

JANUARY 2010

The American Conservative

GOING SOUTH

Third-Worlding America

Ximena Ortiz

Pentagon Spin Machine

Kelley B. Vlahos

The Myth of Nuclear Terror

John Mueller

Another Real Estate Wreck

Charles H. Smith



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[MILITARY]

PRE-CRIME & PUNISHMENT

On an otherwise unremarkable Thursday, hell visited Fort Hood. By the time the gunman's work was done, 13 lay dead, 30 wounded. Compounding the pain was a cruel double irony: many of the fallen had survived Iraq, and the man who took their lives wore the uniform.

In the immediate aftermath, Nidal Hasan's e-mail was aired, his associations scrutinized. Neighbors offered the bland description that fits most killers: quiet, slightly strange, but pleasant enough. An enterprising NPR reporter even tracked down relatives on the West Bank. A portrait began to emerge: here was a deeply disturbed man in the worst possible line of work.

But then the focus widened, as if the carnage was too much to apportion to a single lunatic. Surely others were culpable—not for firing fatal shots but for failing to stop Hasan. He will survive to stand trial, but those who missed the “red flags” will face swifter judgment.

Joe Lieberman, chairman of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, is opening an investigation into “whether the Army missed warning signs.” The FBI is also being called to account, as it reportedly knew a year ago that Hasan corresponded with a Yemeni cleric suspected of having al-Qaeda ties. The Fort Hood rampage raises “the possibility that serious issues exist with respect to the performance of U.S. intelligence agencies,” says Pete Hoekstra, ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee.

At the core of these complaints is a conviction that the massacre might have been prevented if the right people had been paying attention. But dark as that Texas afternoon turned, walk this logic out. Should more citizens' communications be tapped? Their habits analyzed? Their friends questioned? Then what happens if an all-powerful government



deems someone suspect? Should he be locked away for the crime of potential harm? This is the ugly underside of pre-emption come home.

Rush Limbaugh told his radio audience, “Since the FBI was in on much of this, it may be that things were treated as a criminal inquiry, where you have to deal with reasonable doubt, all kinds of restrictions, rather than terrorism.” That’s the dangerous road total war leads us down. Terrorism—this apparently qualifies since Hasan shouted, “Allahu Akbar”—is so uniquely evil, the argument goes, that it renders quaint the rule of law. Nothing should stand in the way of its global prosecution. Not even the freedoms Fort Hood’s finest swore to defend. That could be the coldest irony of all.

[ECONOMY]

WHAT RECOVERY?

Bush, Obama, and Congress slammed the pedal to the floor—but the U.S. economy isn’t going anywhere. All the bank bailouts and stimulus efforts of more than \$1 trillion have bought is a 2.5 percent blip in GDP for the third quarter of 2009. Pollyannas hail this as a recovery. But for most Americans, it doesn’t feel like one. By mid-November, unemployment stood at 10.8 percent. The

price of stimulus, meanwhile, was not just apparent in its nominal price tag—handing out money Uncle Sam never had sent the dollar plunging, while gold soared to a record \$1,147.72 per ounce on Nov. 18. This “recovery” looks a lot like stagflation.

Liberal economists such as Brad DeLong and Paul Krugman complain that the stimulus has not been big enough. Just what do they think would happen to the dollar if we added another trillion or two to the deficit? And would that be enough? Keynesianism is a bottomless pit. Hope, and government spending, springs eternal, at least for DeLong and Krugman, but Obama needs to show some results. The administration sold stimulus as a path to job creation. With labor statistics putting the lie to that, Obama has now begun to talk of “jobs saved”—in some cases in places that don’t exist. ABC News reported, “In Arizona’s 15th congressional district, 30 jobs have been saved or created with just \$761,420 in federal stimulus spending. ... There’s one problem, though: there is no 15th congressional district in Arizona; the state has only eight districts.”

A stimulus that has hastened the bankruptcy of the nation has given us one quarter of lackluster growth—without any new jobs. With commercial real

estate threatening to tank the way housing did last year, and with mortgages vouchsafed by the Federal Housing Administration looking ever more like the subprimes, the odds of a double-dip recession are mounting. Blame Obama and Congress—but also blame the spendthrift Republicans who prospered under Bush.

[HEALTH]

FEDERAL TROUGH

On Saturday, Oct. 24, President Obama declared swine flu a “national emergency.” If the statement sounded familiar, that’s because it was: six months earlier, the White House had announced a “public emergency” over the fearsome H1N1 virus. Clearly we weren’t scared enough the first time.

“As a nation,” intoned our physician in chief with wartime gravitas, “we have prepared at all levels of government, and as individuals and communities, taking unprecedented steps to counter the emerging pandemic.”

Be afraid, but don’t panic—big bro has it covered. By slapping a “national emergency” tag on the problem, we were told, the Department of Health and Human Services could override federal restrictions and set up special 24-hour clinics in public buildings to immunize all Americans.

Except it can’t. In July, the government promised that 160 million doses of H1N1 vaccine would be ready in time for flu season—all for a measly \$1.3 billion. Come November, however, only 28 million shots had been made available, and the virus had spread widely in 46 states. Across the country, anxious Americans were turned away from those vaccination clinics—no jabs here, ma’am, but take some hand sanitizer.

As *TAC* went to press, H1N1 had not yet mutated into the monster of our government-conjured nightmares. With any luck, it never will. For anybody suffering

from the delusion that Obama’s plans for nationalized medicine will improve our country’s health, his administration’s spectacular bungling of the swine-flu outbreak should serve as a timely shot in the arm.

[WAR]

CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN IRAQ

Fallujah, scene of some of the Iraq War’s fiercest fighting, was always going to be a long time struggling back to its feet. More than half of its 39,000 homes were damaged in Operation Phantom Fury. (Don’t be fooled by the ghostly handle: locals know full well who rained fire on their city.) Only 2,500 families have been compensated, and rubble remains the city’s defining feature.

But the worst news is only now breaking, for rather than taking months or years to move past the war, Fallujah may be suffering for generations. Doctors report an unprecedented spike in birth defects—15 times the usual rate of infant deformity, including a baby born with two heads. Many children have central nervous system problems and multiple tumors. On Nov. 2 alone, *The Guardian* reports, “There were four cases of neurotube defects in the neo-natal ward and several more were in the intensive care ward and an outpatient clinic.”

The U.S. government initially denied dropping white phosphorus, but now admits to using the incendiary chemical. The children’s afflictions are also consistent with radiation poisoning. The head of Fallujah’s pediatric ward has begged international experts to take soil samples, but the tattered Coalition of the Willing is more interested in getting out than digging in.

Eventually even America will leave. But for thousands of Iraqis our presence will long linger—in the shadow of their ruined communities and on the faces of their broken babies. ■

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Going South

Militaristic, corrupt America increasingly resembles a Third World state.

By Ximena Ortiz

DESPITE A CHANGE of presidents, America remains mired in economic, institutional, and cultural purgatory, with Obama's exalted oratory circling the stratosphere like a taunt.

Angry nationalism shouts down prudence. Disproportionate military spending threatens economic wellbeing. Industry has its hand so deep in the government's purse that private enterprise is becoming public property. The currency falters, the infrastructure crumbles. And a supine media, once a watchdog of the powerful, happily licks the strongman's hand.

If the picture looks familiar, that's because we've seen it many times before, from Argentina to Chile to Russia. The U.S. is third worlding.

That statement may smack of hyperbole. It may also understate the phenomenon, for many of the countries that the United States increasingly resembles are not only Third World—they are authoritarian, even rogue.

This is not to say the U.S. will be indistinguishable from a Third World country any time soon. We're clearly nowhere near Sudanese levels of violence or Bangladeshi depths of poverty. But in terms of institutional structure, financial stability, and even national spirit, the U.S. looks little like the country it was a generation ago and more like nations it has long condemned.

The turning point came on 9/11. Terrorism is now a weary concern: other issues dominate the headlines—stimulus, healthcare, climate change. Yet the attacks were a pretext for a host of for-

eign and domestic policies that promised to secure America against its hell-bent enemies but have instead dragged the country down, eroding the qualities that distinguished it from the rest of the world.

Honor Killing

As George W. Bush was fond of doing, Barack Obama looks penetratingly into the camera, addressing all the South Asian terrorists watching CNN from their burrows. He vows to defeat them—using other people's lives. With demagogic mastery, he, too, has tapped America's proud warrior culture, a latent force before the age of terror.

This emphasis on offended honor—particularly male honor—is an integral part of life in the Third World. Where the rule of law is weak, men learn to fend for their own charges, and humiliation must be quickly avenged to uphold street cred. This cultural strain exists even among educated elites, who dress and sound much like their American counterparts, but harbor ingrained machismo.

A repressive leader quickly realizes that the best way to unite his countrymen is to rally them against an outside threat—actual or invented. When Evo Morales became president of Bolivia, he stoked hostility with Chile, blocking the construction of a pipeline to export Bolivian natural gas, at significant cost to his own nation, because it would pass through Chile. In North Korea, a tradition of defiance and nationalistic self-reliance, known as *juche*, is a cultural imperative. If the regime abandoned its bellicose posturing, its power mystique

would shatter. Across the Muslim world, the pursuit of honor is a crucial driver in jihadi recruitment. As Akbar Ahmed puts it in *Islam Under Siege*, a sense of grievance motivates extremism, but even “those societies that economists call ‘developed’ fall back to notions of honor and revenge in times of crisis.” Sept. 11 proved his point.

The fact that 19 misfits with boxcutters scarcely constituted an invading army was of little consequence—that anyone could touch us so shocked the American system that we lashed out with disproportionate fury. When wounded ego drives policy, force becomes the default. Far from being a passing spasm, this honor impulse has become a way of life. It rules our international conduct and makes our wars nearly impossible to quit. Andrew Bacevich, a former U.S. Army colonel and author of *The New American Militarism*, writes, “There was a time in recent memory, most notably while the so-called Vietnam Syndrome infected the American body politic, when Republican and Democratic administrations alike viewed with real trepidation the prospect of sending U.S. stoops into action abroad. Since the advent of the new Wilsonianism, self-restraint regarding the use of force has all but disappeared.”

As the martial spirit rises, soldiers are necessarily heroes, even though they are treated as expendable. Patriotism is defined in militaristic terms. And it's not unusual for an American president to wear a jacket with “Commander in

Chief” emblazoned across the chest—an only slightly subtler version of Chavez and Castro couture.

From the Shadows

In countries with a history of authoritarianism, it is not uncommon for the practiced agitators who presided over a crisis to hold sway long after they appear to exit power. In Russia, former president Vladimir Putin rules extra-officially. In Chile, for years after the transition to democracy, the military was guaranteed seats in the legislature. In Argentina after the Dirty War, the army staged rebellions to compel the executive to limit the scope of prosecutions. Even after a crisis subsides, much of the population remains in panic mode and supports the bare-knuckled approach of the previous government.

America is similarly afflicted. Dick Cheney wields such clout that even after his term ended he gave the order and previously classified information on “enhanced interrogation” was made public. His contention that the disclosure proves the value of those interrogations remains inconclusive, but he demonstrated his reach.

Barack Obama, for all his pledges of transparency, has upheld government secrecy to shield the previous administration and the former vice president in particular. He blocked the release of the FBI’s interview of Cheney in the Valerie Plame case, though a federal judge recently rejected arguments for keeping the file sealed. The Obama administration has promoted, through its actions and its rhetoric, the fiction that post-9/11 abuses were committed by “bad apple” agents rather than condoned by high-ranking officials. The Obama and Bush administrations have both sought to block the release of detainee abuse information. Obama has also declined to release new pictures of prisoner mistreatment, breaking his earlier pledge.

His Justice Department’s investigation of CIA excesses will be circumscribed to lower-ranking, “rogue” agents. And Cheney has already de facto immunized those who transgressed the Bush administration’s abusive guidelines. In August, Chris Wallace asked him, “So even these cases where they went beyond the specific legal authorization, you’re OK with it?” Cheney, unhindered by such quaint constraints as the rule of law, responded with a succinct “I am.”

Here the Third World shames us. There, when prosecution has been problematic, post-crisis justice has included truth commissions, which rigorously document abuses (as in Chile after the transition to democracy) or complement prosecutions targeting those on the very top (as in Argentina after the Dirty War). Interestingly, Cheney appears to have cribbed from the Argentine junta’s self-aggrandizing farewell statements. He claims abusive interrogators risked their lives and “deserve our gratitude”—as he surely does, too.

Our current president may make pious pronouncements about America’s founding principles, but his actions belie his luminous words. In a May speech, Obama professed, “I believe with every fiber of my being that in the long run we also cannot keep this country safe unless we enlist the power of our most fundamental values.” He then pledged that he would continue imprisoning detainees who “cannot be prosecuted” for lack of evidence. And the administration is mounting a legal challenge to transfer, in effect, Guantanamo to Bagram, making the latter prison America’s primary human warehouse for detainees that the government holds without charges. In 30 of the 38 Guantanamo-related *habeas corpus* cases lower courts have heard since the Supreme Court’s *Boumediene* decision in 2008, judges have found that the government lacked credible evidence—the

lowest evidentiary burden—to continue incarceration of detainees.

Do indefinite imprisonments, immunity for favored agents, and rule by executive diktat sound like best democratic practice? Crisis-rocked Third World countries eventually move on, setting up truth commissions and holding trials. But the United States remains very much in the grip of a 9/11 emergency mentality.

The War on TV

Writing about the Argentine media during the Falklands War, Rodolfo Braceli recalled, “The majority of the media and many notable journalists, more than being submissive and saving their skin, had a good time. They were not victims. Nor were they innocents. To say they were not innocents is the gentlest of ways of saying that they were, also, particularly culpable. ... And there is more to reexamine: submission out of fear is one thing, and quite another is the genuflection, sugar-coated and gleeful, of complicity. Of the latter there was too much.”

We are not much better today. Reporter Ashley Banfield described coverage of the Iraq War by embedded reporters: “It was a glorious, wonderful picture that had a lot of people watching and a lot of advertisers excited about cable news. But it wasn’t journalism, because I’m not so sure that we in America are hesitant to do this again, to fight another war, because it looked like a glorious and courageous and so successful, terrific endeavor.”

The U.S. media has long enjoyed an independence that even its European counterparts, with their strict defamation laws, don’t have. In terms of objectivity and freedom, Third World media has always been the weaker cousin of America’s Fourth Estate. Journalists do not come from the moneyed class and are routinely bullied by high-ranking officials who have accrued generations of privilege.

That independence eroded dramatically after Sept. 11. Americans tuning in to the evening news saw flags undulating in the background of war reports, often coupled with a subtle, flapping sound-effect tying war to patriotism. State TV it was not—not yet anyway. But just when the media's role became most critical, it turned uncharacteristically compliant.

Recall May 1, 2003, the "Mission Accomplished" moment, when coverage sounded more like unmodified PR than impartial reporting. An equal participant in the pageantry, CNN informed viewers that Bush had made a "picture-perfect landing," was greeted by the roar of the seamen's approval, and had underwater survival training to prepare for his flight. All that was missing was a reverential bow to "Dear Leader."

Long before the Pentagon discovered embedding, the Argentine junta selected the journalists allowed into the Falklands to cover the conflict and checked all news content. As *Stars and Stripes* reported in a recent series, the Defense Department has been following a similar strategy, hiring the Rendon Group to prepare graded reports on journalists seeking embed positions, assessing how favorable their coverage has been. (That the Pentagon continued to use Rendon at all is highly suspect given the group's disreputable history. Prior to the Iraq War, Rendon promoted million-dollar contracts to Ahmad Chalabi, who, in turn, forwarded fraudulent intelligence reports on Iraqi weapons to the Pentagon.)

In September, after the Associated Press distributed a photo of a dying Marine, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates attempted to block publication, claiming it would mark an "unconscionable departure from the restraint most journalists and publications have shown covering the military since Sept. 11." He was uncharacteristically correct:

AP did break from common practice by showing the reality of the war. Gates's public rebuke highlights the degree to which the U.S. government is willing to interfere with journalistic prerogatives—and how little space remains between us and the Third World nations we condemn for restricting freedom of press.

After eight years of lost life, money, and credibility in Afghanistan, the new administration now promotes the war in a more subdued way. President Obama and General McChrystal acknowledge steep challenges, but argue there is a "newness" to the campaign in Afghanistan. It cannot be put into historical context of any kind. The media and commentariat nod obediently.

The Good War

The armed forces of states such as Russia and Pakistan enjoy considerable clout and resources, but that often benefits only the upper tiers, which deploy foot soldiers with little planning or consideration of risk. In 1996, during Russia's war with Chechnya, national security adviser Alexander Lebed admitted that Russian soldiers were "hungry, lice-infested and underclothed."

Despite the lip service paid to U.S. troops, they face similar, often life-threatening shortfalls. Recall the haphazard, bring-your-own-armor approach to the early phase of the Iraq War. Gen. Anthony Zinni echoed some of Lebed's concerns when he said of the preparations for the Iraq War, "I saw, at a minimum, true dereliction, negligence, and irresponsibility; at worst, lying, incompetence, and corruption."

In September, a former Air Force staff sergeant working for a private contractor was found dead in a shower in Baghdad's Green Zone. Adam Vernon Hermonson had served three tours of duty in Iraq and one in Uzbekistan. A military medical examiner concluded that he was killed by low-voltage electrocution.

Earlier this year, an electrical expert for the Army Corps of Engineers, Jim Childs, testified that roughly 90 percent of contractor KBR's new construction in Iraq was not properly wired. Yet KBR was paid more than \$80 million in bonuses for its electrical work. To this day, it has not been held accountable for the injuries and deaths of troops who guarded a toxin-polluted facility that provided treated water. According to whistleblowers and memos, KBR knew the facility was contaminated with sodium dichromate, which is linked to cancer, long before the company informed U.S. officials. Nearly 1,200 troops were exposed to the substance, and the Army is refusing to provide most of the injured veterans with health benefits. But again, KBR received bonuses.

How smoothly our leaders speak of supporting the troops—only to command them carelessly and forbid them from leaving when their tours end. To fill its quotas, top brass persists in the institutional sleight of hand known as "stop loss," forcing troops to serve prolonged and serial deployments. Many who return home scarred will struggle to get care: 37 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffer mental-health issues. The *Marine Corps Times* reports that 915,000 unprocessed claims are waiting at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Once we followed the Third World into the strategic cul de sac of relying on force to solve problems, we needed a deep supply of cannon fodder. And when the democratic will waned, mercenaries were brought in to make up the difference. In Afghanistan, they outnumber U.S. troops, with 68,197 contractors in the theater, 67 percent of the total force. In Iraq, there is one KBR worker for every three U.S. soldiers.

In tone, President Obama departs from the Third World approach to problem solving. He outlines a decorous AfPak policy, calling for development

funding, declaring America's "great respect for the Pakistani people," and stating that "a campaign against extremism will not succeed with bullets or bombs alone"—all while ratcheting up violent confrontation and employing the bluntest instruments of warfare. He has escalated drone attacks, which have caused significant civilian deaths, and has requested an increase in funding for unmanned aircraft.

During his campaign, Obama promised to raise military spending—as did every other major candidate. He has kept his word, even though the United States spends more than all other countries combined on defense. In the CIA's ranking of military spending as a percentage of GDP, Third World countries dominate the first 50-plus slots, with the United States in the middle of the heap at number 28, flanked by Chad and Libya—hardly flattering company. This disproportionate devotion to military spending has had profound costs, hastening the country's economic meltdown.

Bailout of Necessity

In the Third World, crises often beget ill-considered policies that result in economic blowback—which in turn breeds further crises. Leaders try to rush their initiatives before legislatures (where they exist) and the media (where it is allowed to operate) have a chance to air drawbacks or propose more moderate alternatives.

This became America's *modus operandi* after the banking crisis morphed into a global economic catastrophe. The U.S. government found itself in an unenviable position: the treasury had been depleted by two wars, and the American people had already been called upon to show their patriotic conviction by shopping. So it resorted to calling for emergency measures with a huge price tag and, in Third World-style, courted considerable moral hazard.

Like America today, Argentina in the 1980s had not recovered economically from its war and the profligacy of the junta when crisis struck. President Carlos Menem responded by invoking 472 Decrees of Urgency and Necessity from 1989 to 1998, refining the Third-World art of crony capitalism and state-power centralization. He used privatization as a form of political patronage, doling out the country's assets at below-market prices, with no bidding, or vetting.

Now the U.S. government has passed its own bipartisan policies of urgency and necessity. In a letter to congressional leaders shortly before Obama's inauguration, Larry Summers made the appeal for the second round of TARP funds, claiming that the need for billions of dollars was "imminent and urgent." Obama promised to improve TARP's transparency: "Many of us have been disappointed with the absence of clarity, the failure to track how the money's been spent." But his Treasury Department has done the opposite. Moreover, TARP has overwhelmingly aided the big banks; homeowners have seen scant relief. The rhetoric is populist, the practice elitist.

It is not only the opacity with which TARP spoils have been divided that suggests crony capitalism; the banking sector itself is becoming an oligopoly, less removed from the Third World's skewed, non-competitive structures than U.S. citizens would like to admit. TARP, after all, amounts to small change when compared to the arcane government programs benefiting the big banks—TLGP, TALF, PPIP: a stew of acronyms incomprehensible to the citizens who write checks. Banks with more than \$100 billion in assets are borrowing at interest rates 0.34 percentage points lower than the rest of the industry. In 2007, that difference was only 0.08 percentage points.

In his book *Latin America at the End*

of Politics, Forrest Colburn argues that economic turmoil shocked Third World citizens into accepting a strain of so-called liberalization that is heavily weighted toward monopolies and maintains chasmic inequalities in exchange for relative stability. America's bank rescues have taken on similar dimensions.

As in Menem's Argentina, the Obama administration has chosen winners and losers. And as the market-distorting impact of his programs becomes evident and public anger grows, our president has taken to the bully pulpit to showcase his talent for economic demagoguery, another well-worn tactic of Third World leaders. Obama singles out unpopular market actors for scorn, much like former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed, who at the end of the '90s blamed George Soros and other "speculators" for the collapse of his country's currency. A decade later, the American president would fault "a small group of speculators" who endangered "Chrysler's future."

Hector E. Schamis wrote of Menem's maneuvers, in a passage that now seems prophetic of what would happen in the U.S., "by colluding with the largest segments of Argentina's business groups, Menem cemented a minimum winning coalition that benefited from the economic reform program and provided key political support. By distributing selective incentives among potential opponents, he divided and disarticulated rivals."

As in so many collapsed countries, an increasingly large portion of American wealth goes toward debt. Infrastructure sags. Only industries favored by the government thrive. The middle class shrinks as it is squeezed to fund programs that keep the wealthy comfortable and the poor from rioting. The only difference is that the U.S. has an ability to continue borrowing—for now.

Continued on page 50

How to Become a Trillionaire

All the money that's unfit to print

By Tom Streithorst

THE MCDONALD'S on Spring Street has shut down. I had sold my first edition of *Infinite Jest* for \$500,000 and figured I would treat myself to a Happy Meal. But when I got there, the manager was boarding up. "Can't get potatoes, can't get meat," he told me. "It's all the hoarding in the Farm Belt." I can't blame the farmers; why sell food for worthless dollars when you can make real money exporting to Mexico?

Di Tommaso's down the block is still open, but I can't afford \$1 million for their linguini a la vongole. They have no problem getting supplies since the owner was savvy enough to shift his assets into Swiss francs early. The speculators and oligarchs who eat there pay in foreign currency.

As I'm walking by, glancing at the girls holding "Will Strip For Food" signs, I see one of my old students tucking into veal scaloppini. George has done well for himself, buying Detroit factories for a song then selling them for scrap to Brazilian steelmakers. I stand in his eye line, hoping he will recognize me and buy me lunch.

It's my lucky day. He waves me over. "Professor, come, sit down. My friends and I were just discussing whether the destruction of the dollar was inevitable." He turns to the table. "Let's see what a real scholar has to say." I am happy to sing for my supper.

Some of the faces at the table are familiar from RichPeople.com. George introduces the others. Ofra, a fashion designer—her expression bland as her Pucci dress is bright—has just opened a

sweatshop in Long Island City. She does good business exporting high-end couture to East Asia. Jun used to be with the Korean central bank but is now buying up American companies. Bruce, fat and sloppy with spaghetti stains trailing down his striped shirt, is a currency and commodities trader who made his fortune early in the crisis, shorting T-bills and buying wheat futures. Fernando is a Sao Paulo industrialist—elegant suit, no tie. He is looking to move his factories out of high-wage Brazil into low-wage America. His watch cost more than my car. And then there's Mindi, my neighbor's daughter, a blonde pixie who dropped out of Princeton when her parents couldn't afford the tuition. Now she is Bruce's arm candy. I don't think she is that fond of him.

"The dollar had been overpriced for generations," Ofra pronounces. "As long as we were the world's reserve currency, we got to consume more than we produced. That made us fat and lazy and we lost our competitive edge." For Ofra, there is no greater offense than growing fat. She pauses to light a cigarette. "Everybody knew the dollar had to fail. And as soon as it started to go, no one wanted to be the last sucker holding greenbacks."

George shakes his head. "No, it wasn't inevitable, not at all. It wasn't even economics, it was politics. If it hadn't been an election year, if President Levi Johnston hadn't tried to distract the press from his daughter's pregnancy by making that speech defending Taiwan's Declaration of Independence, we could have kept muddling along."

Jun interjects that the Chinese weren't the first to dump dollars: "The Chinese probably would have swallowed their pride and kept on buying. They needed your market as much as you needed their money. But when we in Korea, and the sovereign wealth funds of Brazil, Saudi Arabia, and Germany, began to worry that the Chinese were going to pull out, all of us had to get rid of dollars."

I figure I should say something uncontroversial, just to earn my supper. "If the Fed had mastered the political courage to raise interest rates when it saw the dollar collapsing, that would have strengthened the currency and bankrupted the short sellers," I venture. "Instead, it figured that higher rates would raise unemployment too much, so it kept rates close to zero. Naturally, private buyers then boycotted the auctions for T-bills and the Fed did the same thing the German Central bank did in 1922: they bought all the new debt themselves. That's what turned the fall into a collapse."

Jun agrees: "If we had seen the Fed defending the dollar by raising rates, we might have stopped selling. No one wanted to be locked out of the U.S. market. But when we realized that the American government was willing to let its currency collapse ..." He shakes his head.

A bum with one leg stops by our table. He has a crutch under one arm and a bouquet of flowers in the other. "A rose for the pretty lady? Help an old soldier who has served his country." I've seen this guy around the neighborhood.

Somebody told me he was wounded in the invasion of Gaza.

Bruce inspects the flowers, selects the healthiest one, and picks a \$200,000 bill out of his wallet. "Thank you, sir," the veteran simpers. Mindi plops the rose down next to her plate.

George continues, "If workers hadn't demanded wage increases to match the price hikes, the inflation might have been contained. But no democratic government could have resisted the pressure for indexation—the riots would have become even bloodier. Higher wages fed higher prices. Inflation became self-perpetuating."

Fernando, the South American industrialist, puts down his wine glass. "You are all missing the point." Five heads swivel toward him. "The collapse of the dollar was a choice—a way to avoid paying 40 years' worth of borrowing from the rest of the world. Depreciating the dollar wiped out the entire federal debt."

He leans back in his chair. "Look at it this way: in the '80s, the Japanese bought long-term U.S. Treasuries. When it came time to pay them back, you just rolled over the debt, first to China, then to Saudi Arabia, Germany, and Brazil. But when that debt came due, you were no longer able to roll it over. No foreign lenders stepped in. You had to fork over the cash, and you didn't have it."

"In a way, you were in a similar position to Argentina during the Latin American Debt Crisis. Throughout the 1970s, Argentina received huge loans from the American banks. When interest payments came due, the banks just lent more to cover the interest. The banks were happy: rolling over debt meant huge paper profits. The Argentines were happy: free money let them live beyond their means. But in 1982, lending stopped. Suddenly Argentines had to earn more than they consumed and send the surplus back to Bank of America, Citibank, and their friends.

"People still debate why Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil didn't just default. Other than invasion, which was pretty unpopular back then, there is no way to force a sovereign nation to pay its debts. But the U.S., because its debts were denominated in its own currency, could default the easy way, the legal way, just by letting the dollar fall."

He waves for a second espresso. "America had two options. One: export more than you import. Sacrifice your standard of living for a decade or two in order to repay the debts you stacked up over several generations of high living. Or two: less admirable but more tempting, allow the collapse of the dollar to make your debt, in real terms, insignificant."

Bruce, the currency trader who had been alternating between ogling the half-naked girls outside and devouring his veal parmigiana, chimes in, "He's nailed my strategy. That is why I got out of dollars and into real assets." He chuckles, wiping pasta sauce off his lips. "Hey, it worked out for me."

A hullabaloo at the door distracts us. A black-clad Albanian security guard is tossing the crippled veteran onto the street. "And don't come back," he grunts in accented English.

Mindi, who had been sitting quietly, finally explodes: "Yep, the hyperinflation definitely worked out. Ofra gets to pay cheap wages, Jun buys companies for a song, George profits from the deindustrialization of the Midwest, and Bruce here gets to stuff his face."

She turns to the handsome Brazilian. "Fernando, you're right: the depreciation was a way to stick it to the foreigners who bankrolled our consumption binge. But remember, most debt wasn't held by foreigners. It was held by Americans, by pension funds like my parents'. My Mom and Dad worked hard their entire lives. They didn't pay attention to currency markets, they didn't even read the business page. After 40 years, they were

finally ready to retire, and in the space of six months, the \$2 million that should have supported them for the rest of their lives wasn't enough to fill a gas tank." She looks around the table then says softly, "You guys did alright, but people who played by the rules got screwed."

For a moment the table is quiet. Until now the discussion had been academic, abstract. Bruce breaks the silence with a chuckle. "Well, baby, I guess your parents should have loaded up on debt like the rest of us." Mindi slaps him in the face and storms out. He shrugs and returns to his tiramisu. She'll be back. How else is she going to feed herself and her parents? And if she doesn't, another smart, pretty girl will take her place.

I want to defend Mindi, but I want to eat even more. I glance at George. I hope the outburst won't make him forget that he invited me to dine. My stomach is grumbling and my entire annual pension won't buy a bottled water at this place. ■

Tom Streithorst lived through hyperinflation in Argentina and wrote this dystopian fantasy from Baghdad.

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Hope & Fear

Democratic dominance is not the end of the world.

By W. James Antle III

BY THE END OF THE YEAR, the federal government may have totally restructured the American healthcare system. This health-insurance industry takeover may lead to widespread taxpayer subsidies for elective abortion. A new national energy tax may be imposed to reduce carbon emissions. The secret ballot for union organization may be effectively eliminated, swelling Big Labor's ranks and coffers. Or maybe none of these things will have happened.

Hard as it may be to believe, that last prospect looks most likely. It is a real possibility that none of these major legislative items—all considered inevitable after the Democratic victories of 2006 and 2008—will be enacted by the end of year, or will they pass only in attenuated form. The election of Barack Obama and his party's congressional supermajorities was supposed to signal that change had come. A year later, very little has changed.

This is no doubt disappointing to many of Obama's supporters, for whom the biggest change might be watching their audacious hopes harden into cynicism. The administration's inability to fulfill the wildest dreams of the Left is enraging many of the squabbling interest groups that comprise the Democratic Party, from pro-choice feminists, who balked at the anti-abortion Stupak amendment that was necessary to ram a healthcare bill through the House, to gay-rights groups, who have been told that their status in their party's coalition remains "don't ask, don't tell." But the persistence of the status quo should also

be disillusioning for another group: conservatives who believe that the Republic cannot survive Republican electoral setbacks.

To hear that great red-state prophet Sean Hannity tell it, America stands at the precipice of socialism. But virtually all the socialism now stalking the land—bailouts for the automobile industry, the banks, homeowners, and various other politically favored groups—began under the Bush administration. So did the tidal wave of red ink ready to break over taxpayers' heads. In eight short years, a budget surplus of \$127 billion gave way to a \$1.2 trillion deficit. A big new entitlement was created that added at least \$8 trillion to Medicare's unfunded liabilities, compounding a \$50 trillion shortfall that dwarfs our official national debt and threatens to bankrupt the country.

President Obama and his congressional allies have, of course, made all of these problems worse. Confronted with the Bush administration's overspending, they passed out taxpayer dollars with an even more generous hand. Faced with rising deficits, they borrowed even more money, starting with a \$787 billion stimulus plan that stimulated little besides a retro industry of Keynesian economists. Nobody in Obama's inner circle seems to question whether federal bureaucrats with no experience building cars should really be running General Motors.

But in one significant way, Obama has made things better: when George W. Bush was piling up deficits, growing the federal government, creating new entitlements, and signing sundry stimulus

packages or bailouts, Hannitized conservatives muted their criticism. Worse, they were often Big Government's biggest cheerleaders. Now that Obama is in power, the country's spokesmen for limited government are finally doing their jobs. When the Democrats try to borrow, spend, regulate, and inflate America into oblivion, conservatives are full-throated in their opposition. It wasn't until Obama took office that concerned citizens began holding Tea Parties—at which Sean Hannity is ubiquitous—loudly protesting the direction in which our masters in Washington are taking the country.

To some extent, all the fuss is inversely proportional to anything the Obama administration has actually been able to do. It is reminiscent of the Right's decade of anger at Bill Clinton, who ultimately failed at all his biggest liberal policy initiatives and instead ended up negotiating balanced budgets with a Republican Congress. This modest legacy—and the Big Government conservatism that came afterward—led to a partial reappraisal of Clinton's record from some of his most fervent critics, including conservative publisher Christopher Ruddy and financier Richard Mellon Scaife. In 2007, *Newsmax's* Ruddy was quoted as saying to the *New York Times*, "Both of us have had a rethinking. Clinton wasn't such a bad president. In fact, he was a pretty good president in a lot of ways, and Dick feels that way today."

In fairness, Bill Clinton became the president he was—relatively frugal fiscally, mostly inconsequential otherwise

—because conservatives opposed him so passionately. He had intended a federal-government takeover of healthcare that was in some ways more brazen than anything Obama is likely to sign anytime soon. He had hoped to raise taxes by a greater amount, to emerge as a more consistent champion of abortion and gay rights, and to preside over a bigger, more activist federal government.

But even in the minority, conservatives managed to stop him. With Democrats still firmly in charge of the House and Senate, Clinton was defeated on healthcare, the energy tax, the stimulus bill, and gays in the military. He was also made to regret his victories on gun control and midnight basketball: in 1994, conservatives and Perot-voting independents banded together to throw Clinton's congressional enablers out of office. Judging from the strongly liberal direction he took while Democrats ran Capitol Hill, Clinton's presidency might have turned out very differently without a Republican Congress. Voters thought so: as Bob Dole was tanking in the national polls during the 1996 presidential campaign, congressional Republicans salvaged their young majorities by running ads asking, "Do you want to give Bill Clinton a blank check?"

Obama has yet to contend with divided government. Instead he has a theoretically filibuster-proof Democratic majority in the Senate and a 78-seat margin in the House. But the intensity and effectiveness of conservative opposition has made many congressional Democrats—who fear 1994-like conditions in the 2010 midterm elections—so wary of supporting the more controversial aspects of the president's agenda that his working majority is much smaller. Consider: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi would have never allowed the Stupak amendment, a stronger ban

on taxpayer funding of abortion than the Hyde amendment, to be added to the House healthcare bill if she'd had the votes—her chamber boasts a 59.3 percent Democratic majority—to pass the legislation otherwise.

Conservative activists have not needed a GOP majority in Congress to slow down, or even stop, Obama's agenda. Town hall uprisings and other protests that put pressure on Blue Dog Democrats have been enough. But trouble begins when the Tea Parties become GOP pep rallies, channeling conservative anger into support for unconservative causes and candidates. Under Obama, conservative activism has focused on limiting government. But there are many pundits and political strategists who would like to switch the focus to electing Republicans, reviving the blind party loyalty that led conservatives into the wilderness in the first place.

UNDER OBAMA, CONSERVATIVE ACTIVISM HAS FOCUSED ON LIMITING GOVERNMENT. BUT THERE ARE MANY PUNDITS AND POLITICAL STRATEGISTS WHO WOULD LIKE TO SWITCH THE FOCUS TO ELECTING REPUBLICANS.

That was notoriously what happened in the special election for New York's 23rd congressional district, where the GOP establishment nominated a liberal candidate in the apparent belief that conservatives would have no place else to go. The National Republican Senatorial Committee has also handpicked moderates or candidates whose conservative credentials are unknown to run in several crucial 2010 Senate races: Mark Kirk in Illinois, Michael Castle in Delaware, Charlie Crist in Florida, Rob Simmons in Connecticut, Trey Grayson in Kentucky, and Carly Fiorina in California. (The NRSC has backed off Simmons a bit because former World

Wrestling Entertainment CEO Linda McMahon has promised to finance her own campaign.) Conservatives will be asked to trudge dutifully to the polls to vote for candidates who either support Big Government policies in the Bush-Obama continuum—Kirk and Castle were two of the eight House Republicans to vote for cap and trade—or who remained silent as the massive bailouts commenced.

Some of these Republicans face conservative primary challengers with a legitimate shot at winning the general election. Others are the only GOP candidates with a realistic chance of winning next November because of their home states' bluish tinge. But here conservatives should learn from liberal disappointment with the Democrats: the reason the Democratic supermajorities have been so ineffectual is that they are too dependent on ideologically suspect members whose constituents' underly-

ing political sympathies are for the other party. Getting Democrats elected in Idaho, Virginia, Mississippi, and Arkansas may be good for making Nancy Pelosi speaker and Harry Reid Senate majority leader. It is not necessarily the best path to enacting the Democratic agenda.

But national Republican leaders are headed down the same path—they seek to pad their congressional numbers by electing candidates who will regularly vote against their party on controversial issues, whether because of their own political moderation or their Obama-supporting constituents' demands. This strategy makes some sense in the

CIA trainers report that the Agency is having trouble figuring out what to do with all the new officers acquired during the Bush administration's Global War on Terror.

Agency budgets ballooned in the wake of 9/11, and there was pressure from the White House to increase manpower dramatically. Career Trainee classes, the CIA's equivalent of the military's Officer Candidate Schools, went from an intake of about 100 a year to more than 1,000 in 2002-03. As the numbers went up, the quality of the training went down, particularly as a no-fail system was adopted. The influx of new officers, increasing the size of the Agency from 12,000 to 20,000 over the course of two years, created a demographic problem. The average experience level of CIA officers has dropped to eight years due to resignations or retirements to take lucrative contractor positions. This means that many of the officers instructing new hires at the principal training center near Williamsburg, Virginia lack background. And few of the new officers bring with them qualifications such as foreign-language skills and experience abroad. Many don't have a clue what it's like to live and work in a foreign environment and suffer severe cultural shock if they do go overseas. Most are assigned to the burgeoning number of offices in the United States while those sent to the huge stations in Iraq and Afghanistan are often bored and frustrated, confined to their offices because of security concerns. Many have quit as a result.



The Obama administration is considering cybersecurity legislation that will enable the government to close down the Internet in the event of a national emergency.

Of course, government would have the power to decide what constitutes an emergency. Existing technology already allows for real-time monitoring of many activities that most Americans would regard as constitutionally protected. Telecommunications companies retain detailed records of customer activities. Some Internet providers record every single action taken, including individual keystrokes. In Britain, a new law, with the wonderfully euphemistic title, Intercept Modernization Program—part of the equally splendid Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act—will soon go into effect. It will require telecommunications providers to collect and retain all information on subscribers' activities for a period of six months. Employees of 653 public agencies, most of which have no law-enforcement or intelligence function, can access the information with no judicial oversight. In the United States, such records are maintained in a haphazard fashion by the various service providers, but they can be accessed by the Justice Department through the issuance of a national security letter, which has no judicial review and includes legal penalties for anyone who even discloses that he has received one. More than 35,000 were issued last year. In a recent case in Philadelphia, an Internet service provider was asked for detailed information relating to all traffic on a certain date, to include IP addresses, times, e-mail addresses, physical addresses, registered accounts, Social Security Numbers, bank account numbers, and credit card numbers.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a fellow with the American Conservative Defense Alliance.

Senate, where party-line procedural votes tend to matter more and the filibuster power is on the line. In the House, it makes no difference whether there are 178 votes for John Boehner for speaker or 177. As of now, conservatives can only prevail on a handful of issues in the House, and if a Republican is not willing to take the right side in those fights, the grassroots should be just as pleased to see his seat fall to a Democrat.

There are encouraging signs that conservatives are beginning to understand how they have been used by the GOP. In NY-23, they disregarded all the usual warnings that they sky would fall if a Democrat won an election and supported a conservative third-party candidate over a liberal Republican. That third-party candidate, Doug Hoffman, was hardly ideal—he had no real knowledge of the district he was running to represent—but he forced the liberal Republican from the race and nearly won the seat. Elsewhere, pro-bailout Republicans are routinely booed at Tea Party events.

The Tea Party movement will accomplish nothing if it becomes an appendage of the Republican Party in much the same way that the antiwar movement became annexed to the Democratic Party. It's a truism among veteran conservatives: the GOP is better in opposition than in power. Few activists on the Right follow that reasoning to its logical conclusion, however—that putting Republicans back in control might not be an improvement over a hamstrung Democratic majority. Conservatives should fight Washington's overreach no matter which party is in power, rather than being distracted from their principles by nightmare scenarios of Democratic dominance or sweet promises of Republican utopias. ■

W. James Antle III is associate editor of The American Spectator.

Bitter Fruit

IF WE HAD IT TO DO OVER, would we send an army into Afghanistan to build a nation?

Would we invade Iraq?

While these two wars have cost 5,200 dead, a trillion dollars, and a divided America, what have we won?

Gen. Stanley McChrystal needs 40,000 to 80,000 more troops, or we risk “mission failure” in Afghanistan. At present casualty rates — October was the worst month of the war—thousands more Americans will die before we see any light at the end of this tunnel, if ever we do.

Pakistan, which aided us in Afghanistan, now has a war of its own to fight. Its army is in a battle in South Waziristan, while the country is wracked by terror bombings, the latest in a Peshawar bazaar that specialized in women’s clothing and jewelry and toys for kids. So horrific was the toll even the Taliban and al-Qaeda denied any role in it.

The 130,000 U.S. troops in Iraq are, after almost seven years, to begin pulling out two months after January’s election. But a hitch has developed. Iraq’s parliament missed the deadline for setting the rules. At issue: will voters be allowed to choose individual candidates, or will they be allowed only to vote for slates of candidates?

Gen. Ray Odierno implies that postponement of the election may mean postponement of U.S. withdrawals.

Ominously, in August, terrorists bombed the foreign and finance ministries in Baghdad and later blew up the Justice Ministry and Baghdad Provincial Governorate. And the Kurds are now claiming their control of oil-rich Kirkuk is non-negotiable, which crosses a red line in Baghdad.

Next door, a terror attack by Jundallah (God’s Brigade) in Iran’s southern province of Sistan-Baluchistan killed 40, including two senior commanders of the Revolutionary Guard.

An enraged Tehran pointed a finger at the United States, as there have been charges the CIA has been in contact with Jundallah as part of President Bush’s destabilization program to effect “regime change.”

But Barack Obama has been in office for nine months—and he would never authorize such an attack on the eve of a critical meeting on Iran’s nuclear program. Moreover, the State Department condemned the Jundallah bombing as terrorism and offered public condolences to the families of the victims.

If we didn’t authorize this, who did? Was the timing of this attack coincidental? Were these just freelance secessionists on an operation unrelated to the U.S.-Iran talks? Or is someone trying to torpedo the talks and push Iran and the United States into military collision?

This was a provocation. And whoever carried it out and whoever authorized or abetted it wishes to dynamite the U.S.-Iran negotiations, abort a rapprochement, and put us on a road to war.

Speculation is focusing on the Saudis, the Gulf Arabs, and the Israelis, who have been accused, as has the United States, of aiding PJAK, a Kurdish faction that has conducted raids in northern Iran.

If we have any control of these organizations, we should shut them down. With U.S. armies tied up in Iraq and Afghanistan, and America conducting Predator and cross-border attacks in Pakistan, provoking a war with Iran would be an act of madness.

Looking back, how has all this fighting advanced U.S. national interests? We have a “democratic” Iraq that is Shia-dominated and tilting to Iran. We have an open-ended war in Afghanistan that will likely do for Obama what Iraq did for Bush. But we can’t pull out, it is said, for if we do, Kabul falls and Afghanistan becomes the sanctuary for an Islamist war to take over Pakistan and its nuclear weapons.

And if that should happen, it would indeed be a crisis.

And so, how has all this intervention availed us?

We ran Saddam out of Kuwait and put U.S. troops into Saudi Arabia. And we got Osama bin Laden’s 9/11. We responded by taking down the Taliban and taking over Afghanistan. And we got an eight-year war with no victory and no end in sight. Now Pakistan is burning. We took down Saddam and got a seven-year war and an ungrateful Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Turks, who shared a border with Saddam, have done no fighting. Iran has watched as we destroyed its two greatest enemies, the Taliban and Saddam. China, which has a border with both Pakistan and Afghanistan, has sat back. India, which has a border with Pakistan and fought three wars with that country, has stayed aloof.

The United States, on the other side of the world, plunged in. And now we face an elongated military presence in Iraq, an escalating war in Afghanistan and potential disaster in Pakistan, and are being pushed from behind into a war with Iran.

“America rejects the false comfort of isolationism,” said George W. Bush in his 2006 State of the Union. We did reject that false comfort. We can enjoy the fruits of interventionism. ■

Idle Smashing

An evening with Christopher Hitchens

IT IS TYPICAL of religion to attempt to police our most elemental instincts with a stentorian list of rather *schmutzig* Thou-shalt-nots. Case in point: there I was at the “Morning Joe” studio a few months ago, second wake-up brandy down the hatch and, with seven minutes till airtime, enjoying some discreet (if vigorous) *plaisir solitaire* under the desk, my usual warm-up. Co-host Mika Brzezinski, after coughing none too subtly five times, apparently felt herself “empowered” enough to ask me to desist. Little did she know that the Hitch doesn’t cotton to such clerical fascism.

“What, my dear Mika, would your Pope not approve? Does St. Aquinas proscribe a bit of self-help before airtime? Well, does he? Is it possible, I submit, that you don’t even know?”

La Brzezinski swiftly fell silent, like so many of the devout when their folk-beliefs are questioned even gently.

[Swigs from plastic cup, pauses, vomits]

Mother Teresa evinced so very much lachrymose sympathy for the wretched of the earth even as she cavorted with jet set and power elite: in short, a repugnant phony. And it is not just Trotskyists at heart like the Hitch who have judged her as such. During a rather sumptuous recent evening at Graydon Carter’s new downtown trattoria, not one person present—Salman Rushdie, Tina Brown, Larry Summers, Anderson Cooper, Cate Blanchett, Richard Parsons, Gwyneth Paltrow, Charlie Rose, Kate Moss, and Mike Bloomberg himself—could recall a single kind favor that “Mother” Teresa had ever done for them. *Not one.*

How did anyone ever fall for the hypocrisy of this bon-vivant fraud, this wrinkly Tartuffe? The credulity!

[Swigs from plastic cup, pauses, vomits]

Of all the ecclesiastical grifters ever to have fleeced their flocks, surely none was as slimy as that two-bit Nepalese princeling Siddhartha Gautama. (Martin Amis and I have always called him S-t Arthur Goat Mama, if we may be permitted such a *calembour* in these dark, PC times.)

This vaguely oriental fatso is worshipped the world over and provides bookend support for many craven apologists for religion. But don’t be taken in by the soft, gender-free features of this epicene blob: our buddy the Buddha was not a nice guy. In fact, he was a totalitarian and a bounder. He wrote mash-notes to Mussolini and went to Studio 54 with Henry Kissinger. Like Jesus, Confucius, and Gilgamesh, he was an outspoken opponent of the bikini and an advocate of suicide bombing.

To be sure, had I lived in Nepal at the time I would not have refused a dinner invitation from the so-called “Buddha,” who was certainly among the best-read and best-traveled people in the Kingdom of Kapilvastu, as well as one of the few with whom one might expect to pass an amusing evening. His wine cellar was renowned, and though his evening cable talk show got only middling ratings, the green room was famously well stocked.

[Swig, pause, vomit]

True enough, there have been cock-ups in the Iraqi War for Freedom, includ-

ing a largish number of civilian casualties. This is what Bertie Wooster would have called “a bit of a facer.” That said, I still look forward to joining my Iraqi comrades in Fallujah or Sadr City for a long-promised champagne toast to democracy, and we will thumb our noses at the appeasers, theocrats, and weak-kneed defeatists.

I would go next week, if only I could. But Charlie Rose has me on, and one learns that champagne is terribly hard to come by in Iraq. Turns out, dear friends, that Iraq is full of, well, Muslims, and of the worst teetotaling persuasion. Fascistic.

[Swig, pause, vomit]

Excremental. I’m afraid no other word will do for the Upanishads. Frankly, they make the Koran read like Proust. (For this reason Mart and I have always referred to them the Upanis-ts and no, I don’t expect this *mot* to go anywhere other than soaring over the empty heads of some 750 million Hindu suicide bombers and their craven liberal apologists.) Excremental. The sheer credulity of people once again does not fail to astound.

Yes, there have been setbacks in our great struggle against Islamic fascists, but that will not dent our resolve. We shall fight them on the blogs and we shall fight them on “Hardball with Chris Matthews.” We shall fight them in *Vanity Fair* and we shall fight them at *Huffington Post*. No matter the collateral damage, no price is too high! As the much maligned Donald Rumsfeld quipped to me over lunch not long ago, these days you can’t make an omelet

without killing a hundred thousand civilians—a sacrifice I, for one, would not hesitate to make all over again. *Écrasez l'infame!*

[*Swig, pause, vomit*]

There are many indications that the invasion of Iraq is bringing democracy not just to Mesopotamia but to Africa, Burma, and all of China. Some might call it as a miracle, but it's not as incredible as it sounds, for it is just as Ahmad Chalabi prophesied and preached. Skeptics and backsliders won't like it, but the signs and wonders are all plain to the true believer!

[*Ahmad Chalabi in Tinkerbell drag appears in a burst of glitter over Hitchens's shoulder.*]

For as it was written, the Army of the Petraeus doth everywhere smite the infidel and so promoteth democracy with the selfsame smiting!

[*Chalabi/Tinkerbell waves wand in a tinselly flash.*]

For the Kurd layeth down with the Sunni, and the Shi'ite doth lay with the twain, as it was foretold by us, and there is peace, but for a dozen car bombs each week!

For verily, look unto the wondrous success of Afghanistan, where the liberal pluralist state doth spring up as if by unseen hand, and there is peace and prosperity free of corruption and the Taliban is gone forever! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

[*Chalabi/Tinkerbell vomits on Hitchens.*] ■

—As witnessed by Chase Madar

Chase Madar is a civil-rights attorney in New York City. Christopher Hitchens is the author of God is Not Great and is the favorite intellectual of Dennis Miller.

— OLD AND RIGHT —

I WISH SOMEONE would offer a prize for a good, simple, and intelligible definition of "Government." What is it? Where is it? What does it do? What ought it to do? All we know is that it is a mysterious personage; and, assuredly, it is the most solicited, tormented, overwhelmed, admired, accused, invoked, and provoked of any personage in the world.

The hundred thousand mouths of the press and of the platform cry out all at once: "Organize labor and workmen. Do away with egotism. Repress insolence and the tyranny of capital. Make experiments upon manure and eggs. Cover the country with railways. Irrigate the plains. Plant the hills. Make model farms. Found social workshops. Colonize Algeria. Suckle children. Instruct the youth. Assist the aged. Send the inhabitants of towns into the country. Equalize the profits of all trades. Lend money without interest to all who wish to borrow. Emancipate Italy, Poland, and Hungary. Rear and perfect the saddle-horse. Encourage the arts, and provide us with musicians and dancers. Restrict commerce, and at the same time create a merchant navy. Discover truth, and put a grain of reason into our heads. The mission of Government is to enlighten, to develop, to extend, to fortify, to spiritualize, and to sanctify the soul of the people."

The oppressor no longer acts directly and with his own powers upon his victim. No, our conscience has become too sensitive for that. The tyrant and his victim are still present, but there is an intermediate person between them, the Government—that is, the Law itself. What can be better calculated to silence our scruples and which is perhaps better appreciated to overcome all resistance? We all, therefore, put in our claim, under some pretext or other, and apply to Government. We say, "I am dissatisfied at the proportion between my labor and my enjoyments. I should like, for the sake of restoring the desired equilibrium, to take a part of the possessions of others. But this would be dangerous. Could not you facilitate the thing for me? Could you not bring up my children at the public expense? or grant me some prizes? or secure me a competence when I have attained my 50th year? By this means I shall gain my end with an easy conscience, for the law will have acted for me, and I shall have all the advantages of plunder without its risk or its disgrace!"

As it is certain, on the one hand, that we are all making some similar request to the Government, and as, on the other, it is proved that Government cannot satisfy one party without adding to the labor of the others, until I can obtain another definition of the word Government, I feel authorized to give my own. Who knows but it may obtain the prize?

Government is the great fiction, through which everybody endeavors to live at the expense of everybody else.

—Frédéric Bastiat, "Government," 1849

Confessions of a Chickendove

In the past 100 years, so far as I know, no member of my family has died for his country or even served in the military, unless you count my father, who served briefly

in the Home Guard during World War II, and my mother's half brother, who served in the U.S. Army in Europe in the same war but was never acknowledged as part of the family.

Much the same is true of my wife's family. She had a dearly beloved uncle who was a major in the USAAF (ground staff), but other than that, zilch, unless you count—and here we are going back 150 years—her great-great grandfather, Egbert, who apparently enlisted three times in the Union Army for the sake of the signing bonus, which means, of course, that he deserted twice.

Even if there is room for frivolity here, there is none for complacency. "Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier, or not having been at sea," said Dr. Johnson. How well I know that.

Back in the 1960s, I lived in Australia and narrowly missed having to register for Vietnam. I was a few months too old for the draft, or so I gathered from the full-page ads the government placed in the newspapers. I have to admit that I did not read them with scrupulous care. There was nothing to stop me from volunteering, of course, but I preferred to engage in drunken pro-war rants at parties given by nice antiwar liberals and then to sleep it off in the safety of my suburban bed.

In 1966, an election year, the conservative prime minister, Harold Holt, campaigned on the slogan "All the way with LBJ" and won in a landslide. A little over a year later, alas, he went swimming near Melbourne and was never seen

again. Conspiracy theorists believed that the premier was a communist spy and that he'd been picked up by a Chinese midget submarine and taken off for a happy retirement in the People's Republic. I was never persuaded by this one. Nor was Holt's widow, Zara, who said, "Harry? Chinese submarine? He didn't even like Chinese cooking."

There was in any case no communist conspiracy. Holt had decided that it was in Australia's interest to be more closely allied to the United States, and he was probably right. Given my enthusiasm for that alliance, and for the war, I would

London with Captain Mark Philips, formerly of the Coldstream Guards and many times great grandson of General "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne, "who very carelessly lost the North American colonies at Saratoga, I'm afraid."

Captain Philips fought in North Africa and Italy and was wounded twice, the second time so seriously that he was unable to return to combat duty. "The war taught me this: that there is nothing sillier than killing people," he said.

I so wish, though, that I'd been able to see someone else on Veterans Day. Until this summer, I did not know anyone who had died in a war. In June, however, I heard the shocking news that Paul Mervis, a lieutenant in the Rifles, had been blown up and killed in Afghanistan.

"EVERY MAN THINKS MEANLY OF HIMSELF FOR NOT HAVING BEEN A SOLDIER, OR NOT HAVING BEEN AT SEA," SAID DR. JOHNSON. HOW WELL I KNOW THAT.

have no right to throw a wobbly if someone were to call me a chickenhawk, even though, as an antiwar conservative, I am now a chickendove.

But what is John Bolton? It's hard to say without access to the lab reports, but one thing's for sure: he shows no sign of feeling meanly about himself. He was hot for the war in Vietnam, but decided against putting his money where his mouth is (wherever that is). "I confess I had no desire to die in a Southeast Asian rice paddy," he said, in a sentence that will live in infamy. "I considered the war in Vietnam already lost [in 1970]."

On Veterans Day, I was about as far as it is possible to be from the former U.S. ambassador to the UN. I was at dinner in

In 2005, Paul had worked at the *London Spectator*, where I was an editor, and I'd gotten to know him. He was a modest young man with a ready, slightly unsure smile. He was very clever and well read, and I liked him a lot. He said he wanted to join the army. He was not a nerdy neocon, not at all gung-ho, but he believed he had to give something back to his country. I suggested that it would not be a good idea to enlist, but did not press the point. The chances were that he'd come to no harm.

Now he is dead. Was his death futile, like the war in Afghanistan? No. He died with honor, looking after his men, and such a death cannot be futile. But how I wish he'd not gone to war. ■

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Nuclear Bunkum

Don't panic: bin Laden's WMD are mythical, too.

By John Mueller

ACCORDING TO Defense Secretary Robert Gates, every senior government leader is kept awake at night by “the thought of a terrorist ending up with a weapon of mass destruction, especially nuclear.”

This is, I suppose, understandable. It was in 1995 that the thoughtful analyst Graham Allison declared that “in the absence of a determined program of action, we have every reason to anticipate acts of nuclear terrorism against American targets before this decade is out.” Unabashed, he maintained in an influential 2004 book that “on the current path, a nuclear terrorist attack on America in the decade ahead is more likely than not.” And it was on “60 Minutes,” on Nov. 14, 2004, that former CIA analyst Michael Scheuer assured his rapt interviewer that the explosion of a nuclear or dirty bomb in the United States was “probably a near thing.”

In contrast to such bold proclamations, the evidence about the degree to which al-Qaeda—the only Islamic terrorist organization that targets the U.S. homeland—has pursued, or even had much interest in, a nuclear-weapons program is limited and often ambiguous. Still, the shards that exist have been routinely parlayed and exaggerated by a parade of official and unofficial alarmists.

For example, in 2004, the 9/11 Commission insisted that “al-Qaeda has tried to acquire or make nuclear weapons for at least ten years.” The only substantial evidence it provided for this assertion comes from an episode that supposedly took place around 1993 in Sudan, when Osama bin Laden's aides were scammed

as they tried to buy some uranium. Information about this caper apparently came entirely from Jamal al-Fadl, who defected from al-Qaeda in 1996 after he had been caught stealing \$110,000 from the organization. He tried selling his story around the Middle East, but only the Americans were buying. In his prize-winning *The Looming Tower*, Lawrence Wright relays the testimony of the man who allegedly purchased the substance for bin Laden, as well as that of a Sudanese intelligence agent. Both assert that, although there were various other scams going around at the time that may have served as grist for Fadl, the uranium episode never happened.

It's possible, of course, that Fadl—a “lovable rogue” who is “fixated on money” and “likes to please,” according to an FBI debriefer—is telling the truth, or at least what he thinks is the truth. But his allegations, now endlessly repeated, have gone from a colorful story relayed by an admitted embezzler on the lam to unquestioned fact. We know, it is repeatedly declared, that bin Laden tried to purchase weapons-grade uranium in Sudan. Qualifications, even modest ones, concerning the veracity of the evidence behind that declaration have vanished in the retelling.

Various sources suggest that there were radical elements in bin Laden's entourage interested in pursuing atomic weapons or other weapons of mass destruction when the group was in Afghanistan in the 1990s. Yet the same sources indicate that bin Laden essentially sabotaged the idea by refusing to fund a WMD project or even initiate plan-

ning for one. Analyst Anne Stenersen notes that evidence from a recovered al-Qaeda computer shows that only some \$2,000 to \$4,000 was earmarked for WMD research, apparently for very crude chemical work to make biological weapons. For comparison, she points out that the millennial terrorist group Aum Shinrikyo appears to have invested \$30 million into manufacturing sarin gas.

To show al-Qaeda's desire to obtain atomic weapons, many have focused on a set of conversations that took place in Afghanistan in August 2001 between two Pakistani nuclear scientists, bin Laden, and three other al-Qaeda officials. Pakistani intelligence officers characterize the discussions as “academic.” Reports suggest that bin Laden may have had access to some radiological material—acquired for him by radical Islamists in Uzbekistan—but the scientists told him that he could not manufacture a weapon with it. Bin Laden's questions do not seem to have been very sophisticated. The scientists were incapable of providing truly helpful information because their expertise was not in bomb design but in processing fissile material, which is almost certainly beyond the capacities of a non-state group. Nonetheless, some U.S. intelligence agencies convinced themselves that the scientists provided al-Qaeda with a “blueprint” for constructing nuclear weapons.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the apparent mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks, reportedly said that al-Qaeda's atom-bomb efforts never went beyond searching the Internet. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, technical experts from the

CIA and the Department of Energy examined information uncovered in Afghanistan and came to similar conclusions. They found no credible proof that al-Qaeda had obtained fissile material or a nuclear weapon and no evidence of "any radioactive material suitable for weapons." They did uncover, however, a "nuclear related" document discussing "openly available concepts about the nuclear fuel cycle and some weapons related issues." Physicist and weapons expert David Albright concludes that any al-Qaeda atomic efforts were "seriously disrupted"—indeed, "nipped in the bud"—by the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. After that, the "chance of al-Qaeda detonating a nuclear explosive appears on reflection to be low."

Rumors and reports that al-Qaeda has managed to purchase an atomic bomb, or several, have been around now for over a decade. One story alleges that bin Laden gave a group of Chechens \$30 million in cash and two tons of opium in exchange for 20 nuclear warheads. If any of these reports were true, one might think the terrorist group (or its supposed Chechen suppliers) would have tried to set off one of those things by now or that al-Qaeda would have left some trace of the weapons behind in Afghanistan after its hasty exit in 2001. Yet absence of evidence, we need hardly be reminded, is not evidence of absence. Some intelligence analysts defensively assert that although they haven't found most of al-Qaeda's leadership, they know it exists. Since we know Mount Rushmore exists, maybe the tooth fairy does as well.

A Pakistani journalist was brought in to interview bin Laden just a day or two before al-Qaeda fled Afghanistan. The published texts of what was said vary, but in one transcript bin Laden supposedly asserted, "If the United States uses chemical or nuclear weapons against us, we might respond with chemical and nuclear weapons. We possess these

weapons as a deterrent." Bin Laden declined to discuss the weapons' origins, but his second-in-command separately explained, "If you have \$30 million, go to the black market in the central Asia, contact any disgruntled Soviet scientist and ... dozens of smart briefcase bombs are available. They have contacted us ... and we purchased some suitcase bombs." Given the military pressure that they were under at the time, and taking into account the evidence of the primitive nature of al-Qaeda's nuclear program—if it could be said to have had one at all—these reported assertions were clearly a desperate bluff.

Bin Laden has pronounced on nuclear weapons a few other times, talking about an Islamic "duty" or "right" to obtain them for defense. Some of these oft-quoted statements can be seen as threatening, but they are rather coy and indirect, indicating perhaps an interest, not any capability. And as political scientist Louise Richardson concludes in *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat*, "statements claiming a right to possess nuclear weapons have been misinterpreted as expressing a determination to use them ... this in turn has fed the exaggeration of the threat we face."

When examined, the signs of al-Qaeda's desire to go atomic and its progress in accomplishing that exceedingly difficult task are remarkably vague, if not negligible. After an exhaustive study of available materials, Stenersen finds that, although al-Qaeda central may have considered nuclear and other non-conventional weapons, there "is little evidence that such ideas ever developed into actual plans, or that they were given any kind of priority at the expense of more traditional types of terrorist attacks." There is no reason to believe, moreover, that the group's chances improved after they were force-

fully expelled from their comparatively unembattled base in Afghanistan.

Glenn Carle, a 23-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency, where he was deputy national intelligence officer for transnational threats, warns about taking "fright at the specter our leaders have exaggerated" and argues that we should "see jihadists for the small, lethal, disjointed and miserable opponents that they are." Terrorism specialist Bruce Hoffman remains quite worried about loose terrorist networks, but he also points out that they are likely to be "less sophisticated" and "less technically competent" than earlier terrorists.

In 1996, one of terrorism studies' top gurus, Walter Laqueur, insisted that some terrorist groups "almost certainly" will use weapons of mass destruction "in the foreseeable future." What was then the foreseeable future is presumably now history. In today's reality, terrorists seem to be heeding the advice found in a memo on an al-Qaeda laptop seized in Pakistan in 2004: "Make use of that which is available ... rather than waste valuable time becoming despondent over that which is not within your reach." That is: keep it simple, stupid. Although there have been plenty of terrorist attacks in the world since 2001, all—thus far, at least—have relied on conventional destructive methods. There hasn't even been much in the way of gas bombings, even in Iraq where the technology is hardly a secret.

In sum, any notion that al-Qaeda is likely to come up with nuclear weapons looks far fetched in the extreme. We still have reason for concern or at least for watchfulness. But hysteria—not to mention sleeplessness—is hardly called for. ■

John Mueller is professor of political science at Ohio State University. He is the author of Atomic Obsession: Nuclear Alarmism from Hiroshima to Al Qaeda.

Bring Back the Bad Guys

The logical end of the democracy crusade

By Jeff Huber

CONQUERORS IMMEMORIAL have known that the secret to successful occupations is to let the guys who surrender stay in charge of the yokels. We are presently bogged down in two quagmires because we haven't learned that lesson.

Iraq's government and security forces are incompetent and corrupt, the Kurdish situation remains unresolved, and nobody seems confident that the country will ever be able to function as an independent state again. Oh, for the good old days under Saddam Hussein! Whatever you want to say about the son of a sand dune, he didn't need a field manual to figure out how to run his country. Neither did Mohammed Omar's Taliban need a book on how to run Afghanistan. They have lived in the neighborhood for a very long time.

Decapitating regimes through military force is the most foolhardy of foreign-policy acts. The Prussians discovered this the hard way in the Franco-Prussian War. They defeated the French Army at Sedan and took Napoleon III prisoner along with 140,000 of his soldiers. But the war dragged on for months because the French formed a new government and a new army and kept fighting. They didn't like the idea of Germans occupying their country. Imagine that.

Few military victories have been more stunning than the fall of Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom, but the fighting continues almost seven years later. We supposedly ousted the Taliban from Afghanistan eight years ago, and

we're still trying to oust them. We'd be better off by far if we had never invaded either but worked instead with the power structures already in place. As Tip O'Neill said, "All politics is local."

Now we can't bring Hussein back, and whether Nouri al-Maliki can manage to hold Iraq together remains to be seen. We may yet end up with the three-state solution that Joe Biden proposed in 2006. But whatever falls out, it will only work if we back away. We will never understand Iraq.

Nor will we ever comprehend the political and social complexities of Afghanistan. As is true in most countries engaged in a guerrilla-style civil war, it's impossible to tell the civilians and insurgents apart. Which Taliban are we fighting? There seem to be quite a few. What about the other outfits like Hizb-e-Islami and the Haqqani network? How do the warlords figure in? The tribes?

If there are any good guys in Afghanistan, they aren't part of the corrupt Karzai government that we're propping up. As one Afghan put it, seeking justice from the regime "is like going to the wolves for help, when the wolves have stolen your sheep." But calling the Afghan population the "center of gravity," as our top military leaders do these days, is also a mistake. Populations may be a critical factor in foreign relations but only to the extent that they influence the real strategic center of gravity, political leadership. That's why fictional aliens don't step out of their spaceships and say, "Take me to your tired, your poor ..."

Our success in terminating World War II was a result of leaving the political institutions of our vanquished enemies intact. Germany's Karl Doenitz signed a piece of paper that said "Onkel" and the war in Europe was over. One of our biggest mistakes in Iraq was ousting Ba'athist leaders who knew how to keep things under control. Our biggest mistake in Afghanistan was putting Hamid Karzai in power; he clearly doesn't know how to keep things under control. The closest thing Afghanistan has to a political leader is Omar, who was its de facto head of state from 1996 to 2001. If we ever hope to get our arms around the situation there, we'll have to deal with him.

Making cozy with Omar will rub many in Washington the wrong way, but doing business with your enemies is what foreign policy is about: we hardly have a contemporary ally that we haven't fought a war with at some point in our relatively short history. In Iraq, we lowered levels of violence by bribing the guys who were shooting at us. Successful conduct of foreign policy is a slutty business.

Nobody will argue that these are nice men. Hussein did horrible things to his own people, and Omar's Taliban are a grim lot, but let's face it: they've done less harm to their countries than we have in the process of removing them, so who is the actual bad guy? A great fallacy of our counterinsurgency doctrine is the notion that we can win the hearts and minds of whatever freedom-loving people we happen to be blowing to smithereens.

An even greater delusion is that we actually do counterinsurgency. We don't counter insurgents; we are the insurgents. We're the ones who remove existing governments. We're the ones who prop up puppets. The people we call insurgents are trying to take their countries back from us.

We've spent the last eight years proving that history's mightiest nation can't fix the world's problems at gunpoint. We can do things to encourage good behavior and discourage bad, but we can't have our way all the time. We need to develop a sense of tolerance—and we can afford to. Jingoistic slogans to the contrary, the oceans protect Barack Obama's America just as they protected George Washington's. Nobody has the resources to invade and occupy us. Nobody ever will.

WHAT ABOUT AL-QAEDA? NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER JAMES JONES SAYS THE GROUP IS **DOWN TO FEWER THAN 100 FIGHTERS** ACCORDING TO THE "MAXIMUM ESTIMATE."

And despots tend to bring about their own demises. Libya's Mohammad Khadafi has become a farcical gasbag. Saddam was already a toothless tinhorn when we invaded. The best way to cope with Kim Jong Il is to stop paying attention to him. He doesn't have a pot to cook in. Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a jackdaw with a penchant for the taste of his foot, but he's not the real power in Iran: Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the country's supreme leader. Hugo Chavez isn't worth glaring at. No one can compete with us militarily, and the world's economy would collapse without us. Terrorism has become the weapon of choice against us, but it is best combated through policing and non-military political means.

We have two choices in Afghanistan. We can mount an enormous counterinsurgency operation and allow the effort

to drain us like it drained Britain and Russia, or we can let cooperative elements of the Taliban share power in their country. That may lead to Omar becoming head of state again, but so what? Nobody thinks Karzai is worth a handkerchief-load, and we know he hasn't been legally elected.

What about al-Qaeda? National Security Adviser James Jones says the group is down to fewer than 100 fighters according to the "maximum estimate," and Gen. Stanley McChrystal admits that he sees little sign of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Why would we want to occupy an entire country for the sake of tracking down 100 terrorists who aren't there?

We might be able to coax a strongman like Omar into playing ball with us on

al-Qaeda. If he doesn't, we have other alternatives. Our surveillance and airpower are sufficient to ensure that al-Qaeda doesn't rebuild its infrastructure, and our internal security is significantly improved since 9/11. The Department of Homeland Security is nobody's idea of a great government institution, but we have a focus on countering terrorism within our borders that did not exist eight years ago. Today, nobody swimming in the alphabet soup—NORTHCOM, NCIS, NORAD, CIA, FBI, USCG, etc.—wants to be the sorry slob responsible for letting another terror attack take place.

There's a reasonable fear that if we let the Omars of this world take over their countries we'll eventually create another Hitler, but the real Hitler kicked off World War II with the world's best

army. None of these little Hitlers will ever challenge our military superiority. So the question becomes how much military we need to keep them from becoming too annoying.

Half the force we now have would still be overwhelming. The key to effective use of that much power is to use it sparingly. But we have yet to find a cure for our perverse tendency to molest the world or to understand that the mother of our intervention is not necessity. After World War II, the size and shape of our arsenal kept a general war from breaking out between us and the Soviets, but when we committed ourselves to small Third World wars, we didn't do so hot.

No one will take us on in a symmetric military confrontation now. We're hanging on to a high-dollar force so that we don't have to use it. That's fine—to an extent. Our military can serve a vital function as a force in being, one that extends a controlling influence without actually deploying and fighting. But using it to depose tinhorn strongmen like Hussein and Omar is an errand for fools, as we have so foolishly proven. ■

Commander Jeff Huber, U.S. Navy (retired), writes at Pen and Sword and is the author of Bathtub Admirals, a lampoon on America's rise to global dominance.

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Blame Business Schools?

Their best and brightest broke a country

By Philip Delves Broughton

I WAS RECENTLY COLLARED by a young Polish man studying for an MBA. He had come to hear a debate at a British business school on the motion, "This House believes MBA's are best placed to lead us out of the financial crisis." I was on the opposing and losing team and was heading out of the door when he rushed up, his face wracked with concern. It was a look I had seen before.

He had run his own small business in Poland and rustled up \$30,000 or so to spend a year in the United Kingdom getting his MBA. Several weeks in, he feared he had bought a clunker. The classes seemed abstract and pointless. The faculty was made up of economists with little or no business experience. And his classmates, the network that business schools are renowned for developing—let's call it what it is, an old boys' club—were mostly Indians and Chinese who would be heading straight back East on graduation. It was highly unlikely any of them would play a role in his future in Eastern Europe.

"What do I do?" he asked. "I feel like I'm wasting my time."

Eighteen months ago, I published a book about my experience of getting an MBA at Harvard Business School. I wrote that I'd learned a fair amount at the school and met some interesting people, but found certain aspects of business culture, as symbolized by HBS, rather off-putting.

For Harvard, even mild criticism was too much. Even as their alumni played arsonists and firemen with the world's financial system, the business school's leadership accused me of being a lone

gunman, representative of no one, firing bizarre bullets at their sacrosanct institution. But since my book came out in the United States and around the world, I have received hundreds of questions along the lines of the young Pole's, whether from students at business school, people considering business school, parents and spouses of MBA students, or those in business careers wondering why their lives turned out the way they did.

I now devote time every week to mopping brows, taking pulses, and trying to emit rays of calm to the fevered MBA body. It has been a curious and unanticipated turn in my life, though perhaps not entirely surprising. Most MBA students are not timid cultists, vulnerable to every meaningless rah-rah from the cover of *Fortune* magazine. And they feel uncomfortable in schools and companies that treat them as such.

Moreover, the past two years have been especially hard on the reputation of business schools. Many of the leading actors in the financial crisis assembled their earliest spreadsheets while they were MBA students: Hank Paulson, George W. Bush, Christopher Cox, John Thain, and Stan O'Neal obtained their MBA's from Harvard; Dick Fuld from Columbia. In recent years, some 40 percent of graduates from top American business schools ended up on Wall Street. Surely the profound economic crisis triggered by the failings of the financial sector has to be a crisis for business schools, too?

There were of course plenty of people involved in the financial disaster who did

not have MBA's, the blithering Sen. Chris Dodd and most of the fiends at Countrywide, Freddie Mac, and Fannie Mae, for example. But after years in which the leading business schools have accrued so much influence, both in terms of what and whom they teach, it would be reckless not to ask what went so appallingly wrong.

Are we simply in one of capitalism's necessary purges, a prolonged bout of sweating and vomiting vital to expelling the toxins and returning to a renewed state of vigor? Or was this an avoidable sickness? One that should have been foreseen, diagnosed, warned against, perhaps even prevented by the self-proclaimed business academy?

For business schools, the economic crisis ought to have been an existential crisis. If, as they have long claimed, they provide the intellectual framing, plumbing, and wiring for today's business world, they should be seriously concerned about the quality of their work. If they aren't, then they are rendering themselves irrelevant.

Much of the blame for the crisis, of course, must be apportioned far above the heads of mere business school faculties. One must examine the decoupling of financial services from the rest of the economy—the way in which trading poorly priced derivatives became a world unto itself, permitted by weak-minded regulators and politicians during the Clinton and Bush administrations, and perpetrated by a few vicious and intelligent bankers and many more or less able yet eagerly compromised ones.

The world has tuned in for explana-

tions and solutions to this crisis. For deep discussions of the modern relationship between our economic and social spheres, between Wall Street and Washington, between our business elites and the foreclosure classes, between the bonus kings and the soaring number of unemployed.

Sadly, however, at their moment of greatest opportunity, business schools have proved themselves to be little more than pliant slaves of the corporations they serve. Contrary to their various mission statements, they follow rather than lead, they reassure rather than challenge. During bubbles, they are there with the air pump. And during crises, they toss their hands up and say, "*C'est la vie.*"

That at least has been the response of Harvard. To counter criticism, the business school convened its faculty to chew over what they might have done better in the run-up to the crisis. What emerged, Jay Light, the dean of the school told *Fortune*, was a "renewed appreciation that things can go wrong at all levels." It was a reality the school needed to address with more vigor. There would be some new case studies about the crisis and a couple of new elective courses dealing with the history of the financial system and managing financial firms.

And that, we are led to believe, is that. As a form of intellectual minimalism, it is all quite breathtaking. Behold the carnage, blame all concerned, and move along. The MBA applications roll in, the faculty gather their consulting fees, the corporations keep paying for short courses for their executives, and all is well in b-school land. Generously, one might call it Friedmansque. Stand back, let the system do its worst, maximize shareholder value, and all will be well.

If you ever wondered why Harvard has a reputation for arrogant indifference, the business school's reaction to this ruinous financial crisis should answer any questions.

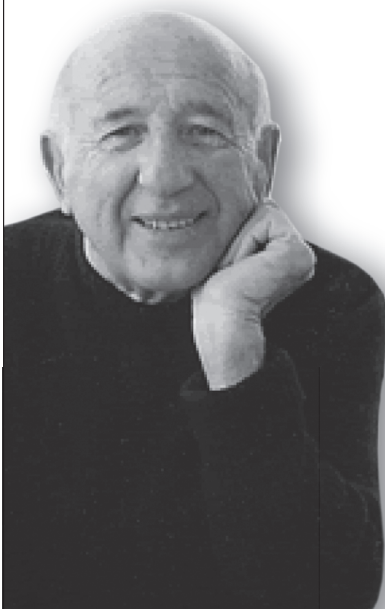
Other schools have shown a little more vim. Dartmouth's Tuck business school has undergone a complete curricular review in the wake of the crisis. At New York University's Stern School, 33 professors contributed to a book on the financial crisis, which then became the basis for a course. Stanford revised its curriculum two years ago because it felt that its students were being trained too narrowly in artificial specialties. The Yale School of Management, one of the most innovative business schools, has been trying to make all of its courses more interdisciplinary so that students see problems not as financiers, strategists, and marketers but from the perspectives of investors, customers, and regulators as well.

Schools further down the academic food chain, those that cannot rely on Har-

vard's endless wave of applications, have experienced another fresh reality. When you ask students to give up tens of thousands of dollars and months of their lives, they want to know that what they're getting will be worth it. Suddenly, the entire value of an MBA is in question.

For years now, graduate business studies have been as much an industry as an academic discipline. The MBA program is like the football team at many universities, a means of bringing in wealthy alumni and corporate support. The overall academic caliber of the students who get into business schools is often lower than that of those in their neighboring undergraduate institutions. But the business schools make up by screening for more intangible qualities such as "leadership potential." The awk-

Fr. Patrick Bascio has taken a position contrary to the hierarchy of his church in his new book, *On the Immorality of Illegal Immigration: A Priest Poses an Alternative Christian View*



"A rare immigration enforcement voice in the Catholic clergy"

— Brenda Walker, VDARE.com, 10/14/09

"Patrick Bascio, enriched by his theological formation and years of experience with the underprivileged, considers the ramifications of illegal immigration that we sometimes fail to see because our perspective is insufficiently broad."

— Rev. Dominique Peridans

On the Immorality of Illegal Immigration: A Priest Poses an Alternative Christian View (AuthorHouse 2009), 213 pages.

Order at Amazon.com and AuthorHouse.com \$16.50 postpaid. Available as an ebook: \$4.95

ward relationship between business culture and the rest of society is in many ways forged through these uneasy campus dynamics.

In 2007, Thomas McCraw, one of the few genuine stars of the Harvard Business School faculty, published a terrific book about Joseph Schumpeter called *The Prophet of Innovation*. According to McCraw's account, the man who gave us the notion of "creative destruction" would have had no time for the heartless modern proponents of his notion. Schumpeter considered capitalism to be the least bad economic system. To credit it with more than that was delusional.

Schumpeter grew up in turn of the century Austria, in a society McCraw calls "techno-romantic"—highly advanced yet also highly cultured. He experienced the First World War, the loss of a wife in childbirth, personal bankruptcy in his late 30s, all before finding professional success and personal stability in the United States.

In his view, capitalism equaled havoc. It was about fortune and reversal, hirings and firings, the pernicious effect of advertising.

"The stock exchange," he said, "is a poor substitute for the Holy Grail." It might be worth having the hosts on CNBC, and indeed business school professors, intone that line on a regular basis.

He believed entrepreneurship was the driver of capitalism yet acknowledged that it has a dark side. It involves shoving aside existing businesses. Thus, as we celebrate the great success of the Asian economic miracle, we must face the situation in Detroit. The triumph of Apple's iPod goes hand-in-hand with the travails of the music industry. This is the nature of things. Everything is in flux. On balance, Schumpeter believed that assuming creation led to destruction, in that order, capitalism was a better economic system than the alternatives.

It is an extremely modest position, not absolutist, arrogant, or know-it-all.

In the final few pages of the book, McCraw writes:

Schumpeter humanized his discipline. After a lifelong struggle, he concluded that exact economics can no more be achieved than exact history, because no human story with a foreordained plot can be anything but fiction. Because of the infinite mixture of influences on human behavior, no two real economic situations are ever exactly alike. Thus, economics does not lend itself to deterministic laws or experiments as physical sciences do. The best mathematics in the world cannot produce a satisfactory economic proof wholly comparable to those in physics or pure mathematics. There are too many variables, because indeterminate human behavior is always involved. As the Nobel Laureate in Economics Douglass North remarked in 1994: "The price you pay for precision is inability to deal with real-world questions."

Yet when you look at the faculties and curricula of most business schools, it is not obvious that they are teaching an appreciation of the infinite variety of human behavior. The field of behavioral economics is increasingly dynamic. The entire world, it seems, wants to know how little things make a big difference or how what we think to be true isn't. But how sterile does much of this research look beside Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* or Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*? How much can any economist add to a discussion of the power of poorly designed financial incentives when we have Raskolnikoff murdering an old woman for a few rubles?

At the other end of the Harvard Business School spectrum from McCraw, we find Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who argues in her latest book, *SuperCorp*, that values-led organizations can thrive. It

doesn't all have to be about the amoral pursuit of profit. Doing business the right way, taking care of employees and the environment can result in business success. It is the kind of book companies will buy by the bucketload. But it also explains why so many people find orthodox business culture so off-putting.

When you look at how most people in the world live, how they raise their families, they do the right thing not just because there's some stingy, short-term advantage. They do it because living virtuously is its own reward. It's the oldest idea out there, and it is embarrassing that any business could consider this to be news. You shouldn't get applauded for acting virtuously. It's the baseline for what's expected of individuals—and should be for companies, too. Only a business-school professor and her audience could find the notion that it is useful to behave according to a sound set of values to be revelatory.

On a recent broadcast on the BBC World Service about MBA's and the financial collapse, one of the interviewees, head of the MBA program at Harvard, said that risk management at the school was "state-of-the-art, but deficient." The first thought that popped into my head was of a refrigerator that tells the time and has a television built into the door but doesn't keep food cold. The technology, the science is all there, but somehow something fundamental has been missed. It was a rather weasly admission that business schools are the clapped-out Alfa Romeo on the side of the road, all vroom-vroom during the good times, but the red paint and leather trim look rather foolish now that the transmission is a smoldering wreck. ■

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Bad Medicine

Republicans enter the healthcare debate—posing as Democrats.

By Sheldon Richman

LATE AT NIGHT on Saturday, Nov. 7, nationalized health insurance—and eventually a government takeover of healthcare—took a giant leap forward. Among the 177 Congressional Republicans, only one voted for the bill, but the party deserves more blame than it has received for the country's drift toward socialized medicine.

Republicans had ten months to offer what they claim to want: a free-market alternative to ObamaCare. Instead, they introduced Obama-lite, clad in a free-market mantle. Only at the last minute, as House debate on Speaker Nancy Pelosi's monstrosity was set to begin, did Minority Leader John Boehner introduce the first GOP bill. It had a few good ideas, but it was hardly a free-market proposal, much less a serious alternative.

At first, Republicans opted for caution, testing the public waters before moving at the last minute to put up a bill of their own—if only to give themselves something to talk about in next year's congressional campaigns. GOP pollster David Winston called it “an intentional strategic shift toward not being just the opposition party but trying to be the alternative party.”

Or maybe the *New York Times* had it right:

The minority party had little interest in putting forward a comprehensive piece of legislation. [A] comprehensive bill would have highlighted disagreements among Republicans, and would have taken a huge amount of time and effort only to

see the measure easily cast aside by the Democratic majority. And putting out a bill earlier would have subjected it to weeks of attack. ... [T]he 219-page bill is less of a complete answer to the Democrats' nearly 2,000-page bill and more of a political message aimed at highlighting the Republicans' contention that the Democrats' legislation is too costly and would dangerously expand the federal government's role in health care.

The GOP strategy helped the Democrats portray the Republicans as the Party of No—not necessarily a bad thing to be when government is growing. But since so many problems in healthcare are attributable to current government interventions that should be eliminated, a mere “no” amounts to a defense of the corporatist status quo.

Since January, Republicans had talked a good game when attacking Democratic proposals. They criticized the so-called public option as a slow move to single-payer, and they raised the threat of rationing inherent in any government plan to control spending. They also opposed the Democrats' insurance mandate for individuals and employers, a repudiation of the disaster Mitt Romney gave Massachusetts. They called for extending the employer-based insurance tax break to individually purchased coverage and for legalizing interstate commerce in health insurance. But these virtuous measures didn't go far enough, and they were overwhelmed by many vices.

Before Nov. 3, the most ambitious GOP proposal belonged to Rep. Paul Ryan, a conservative with a reputation for being a health-policy expert and an entitlement hawk. In a speech at a Cato Institute healthcare conference, Ryan said, “This problem can be fixed, not by pushing the market out, but by bringing the market in. One of the reasons healthcare is not doing well right now, one of the reasons health inflation is so high, one of the reasons there are so many distortions in health care, one of the reasons millions of Americans don't have access to affordable insurance, is because we've displaced the fundamental tenets of a free market.”

This sounds like a good start. He went on, “What are those tenets? Transparency on price, transparency on quality, and an incentive to act on both. Currently, you don't know what services cost, or who's good at providing them and who's bad. Even if you know such things, you're told by your insurance company, HMO, or the government where and who you have to go to to get your care.”

This is typical Washington talk presented as a defense of the free market. “Transparency” and “incentives” are popular political words, but they are not fundamental tenets of a free market. They arise as a result of individual economic freedom. When people have responsibility for their own well-being, spend their own money, and face the tradeoffs inevitable in a world of scarcity, they have incentives to demand clarity and simplicity from

competing health insurers and medical providers, who in turn have to accommodate them to win their business. Competition is key, and what makes competition possible is freedom—specifically consumer sovereignty and the absence of legal barriers to entry. To have freedom, government must back off and permit people to engage in transactions as they see fit. This is precisely what is lacking today.

Nothing about Ryan's prescription would preclude government efforts to create transparency without a free market—he mistakes an effect for a cause. Ryan further muddled the water by saying, "Healthcare is much more than having insurance and access to medical care. It is a moral issue. It is an issue about the role of the federal government and which trajectory America

long proffered equal opportunity as an alternative to the progressive idea of equal results, implicitly endorsing the egalitarian ethic. Egalitarians point out that someone born into a family with a low income hardly has the same opportunity as a wealthy person to obtain first-class medical coverage, therefore government assistance is needed to make equal opportunity a reality. We hear the same argument in education, where Republican conservatives like William Bennett defend tax-financed vouchers with the egalitarian appeal that low-income people should have the same opportunity to attend private schools as the wealthy. Why only in education and medical care? If equality of opportunity means only the absence of legal restrictions, that's fine. But Republicans rarely make this distinction.

from the taxpayers. But subsidies do not come without strings. Does Ryan seriously believe his approach would avoid heavy-handed regulation of the insurance and healthcare industries?

The incoherence of his approach could be seen in his very words when he vowed to create "a mechanism so that the uninsurable ... can also get affordable health insurance." He would accomplish this by instituting "state-based exchanges." No one would be forced to join, but his proposal would "create incentives for states to participate," and "Each of the exchanges must have at least a minimum benefit health plan, without the bells and whistles." Of course, someone would have to define that "minimum benefit health plan," and we know how lobbying and campaign contributions have already overloaded "basic" policies with coverage mandates, increasing the cost and pricing many people out of the market.

Since when is government needed to create markets? They are the most natural thing in the world. People "truck and barter," to use Adam Smith's phrase, whenever they get the chance. The Internet hosts vigorous markets in virtually everything—including life and auto insurance—so why wouldn't competition in health insurance emerge the instant legal barriers were removed?

Ryan's plan, which also included such Obama-lite ideas as expansion of Medicaid and Medicare and a "refundable tax credit" insurance subsidy, was typical of the Republican mentality that predominated until Pelosi's bill finally loomed large. If the Democratic ideal was socialized medicine, the Republicans offered corporatist care, though in practice the two "alternatives" might converge.

Boehner's 11th-hour bid to conjure a free-market aura renounced mandates, compulsory coverage for preexisting conditions, tax increases, and interference in the doctor-patient relationship.

THE RYAN BILL IS **TYPICAL OF REPUBLICAN EFFORTS**. ITS CENTERPIECE WAS TO BE **"UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HEALTH INSURANCE."**

is going to take. Will we stick with the American ideal of equalizing opportunity, of protecting our individual rights, or are we going to replace that vision with a European one, where the goal of government is to equalize the results of people's lives instead of equalizing access to opportunity?"

For generations Washington has intervened at the deepest levels of Americans' economic lives. State and local governments began meddling well before that. Government is now so integrated with the economy that it escapes notice. Yet Ryan speaks of sticking with an ideal and protecting it against those who embrace the European vision. He's a little late. He should read Garet Garrett's "The Revolution Was."

And what is this ideal that he wishes to stick with? Equalizing opportunity. Republicans and conservatives have

The Ryan proposal is typical of Republican efforts. Its centerpiece was to be "universal access to affordable health insurance ... even for people with preexisting conditions..." That endorses the Democrats' keystone myth that one can insure against an existing condition. It makes a mockery of the concept of insurance. Compelling companies to write policies for people who are already sick—an idea endorsed by leading Republicans like Sens. Charles Grassley and Tom Coburn, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, and until the end, John Boehner—can't properly be regarded as "insurance." Calling it "welfare" and openly financing it with taxes, rather than hiding the cost in everyone's premiums, would be more honest.

Moreover, promising that this disguised welfare would be affordable creates expectations of a major role for government—specifically, subsidies

It created no power for the government to dictate the contents of insurance policies, and it endorsed the freedom to buy insurance across state lines and to form purchasing groups, albeit subject to lots of rules and conditions.

Yet his bill was no small-government showpiece. Although about a tenth as long as Pelosi's bill, it was just as couched in impenetrable legalese and brimming with regulations. Its first section, "Ensuring Coverage for Individuals with Preexisting Conditions and Multiple Health Care Needs," would require states to operate a "qualifying" reinsurance program or high-risk pool financed by "state premium assessments" with a federal contribution. This is the GOP answer to the Democrats, who would require insurance companies to cover people who come to them already sick.

The difference between the Republican and Democratic approaches is not clear. House Minority Whip Eric Cantor said, "[I]f individuals find themselves with a pre-existing condition ... their insurance company will be required to go into a re-insurance pool set up in all the states, funded by the federal government, putting \$25 billion into those pools. ... We've got to have a safety net there for individuals with pre-existing conditions, and that is the mechanism." Boehner's bill included standards for what the pools may charge, among many other rules.

Moreover, Boehner borrowed a page from the Democrats by prohibiting private insurers from including annual or lifetime spending limits in their policies. Some individuals might wish to have lower premiums rather than limitless benefits. Boehner says they can't. So much for freedom of contract. His bill would also have paid states to lower insurance premiums and reduce the number of uninsured. That sounds like an invitation to price controls and other interventions by hyperactive state insur-

ance commissioners. While the Boehner bill would have been considerably cheaper than Pelosi's—the CBO says "only" \$61 billion gross, offset by \$52 billion in new revenues, over a decade—it was still a spending program in an era of huge budget deficits.

Boehner also picked up a popular Republican theme: the need to change malpractice law. His bill would have capped non-economic jury awards at \$250,000. Three problems with this are typically overlooked. First, as Shikha Dalmia of the Reason Foundation writes, "Big medicine has long blamed the unnecessary tests and procedures these awards encourage for rising health care costs. But several studies have shown that this so-called practice of defensive medicine is a smaller driver of costs than excess physician salaries." Second, limiting malpractice awards is a blunt instrument that will harm victims of negligence; better to let patients and doctors contract around the tort law. And third, even putting the effects aside, on principle self-proclaimed federalists shouldn't be advocating a national change in malpractice law. That has traditionally been a state matter—"laboratories of democracy" and all that. How eagerly Republicans throw over allegedly cherished principles whenever it's expedient.

The GOP has, again, failed to draw a sharp line between itself and the openly statist opposition. Democrats promise to fund their healthcare overhaul by cutting hundreds of billions out of Medicare. (It is worth pointing out that, political reality being what it is, the Democrats will never deliver on this promise, and if they did, services—not waste—would be cut.) But the Republicans support Medicare with equal zeal: Boehner's bill vowed no cuts in services. This put the GOP in the odd position of opposing "socialized medicine" by defending, well, socialized medicine.

Knowing that the elderly vote in high numbers, it's no surprise that Republicans were quick to campaign against the "death panels" implicit in the Democrats' logic. But in doing so, did Republicans really mean to endorse the idea that the elderly should have all the medical care—at taxpayer expense—that they want without limit?

Medicare stands in the way of lowering the cost of medical care and insurance. Because the government chronically under-reimburses doctors and hospitals, they make up the shortfall by overcharging the rest of us. (We don't care because we think insurance pays the bills.) But increasing reimbursement is not the answer because that would require more government borrowing, more inflation, higher taxes. There's a third, real alternative to death panels and out-of-control Medicare: a privatization plan that would operate independent of government. But Republicans are too worried about elections to talk about that. So they defend Medicare while rejecting Medicare-for-all, a treacherous logical tightrope.

Aside from jettisoning Medicare and Medicaid, exempting individual insurance policies from taxation (a subject on which Boehner's bill was strangely silent), expanding health-savings accounts, and legalizing interstate insurance sales, there's little the national government can do to reform the healthcare market. Most of the change has to come at the state level, where medical and insurance cartels constrict competition and supply, denying consumers innovation and lower prices. But Republicans in Congress don't want to confront these powerful interests. It's easier to rail against socialized medicine on the horizon than address the corporatized medicine that has long been in place. ■

Sheldon Richman is the editor of The Freeman (www.fee.org).

FIRE in the Hole

Just as residential real estate shows signs of strengthening, the commercial market begins to shudder.

By Charles Hugh Smith

YOU DON'T NEED AN EXPERT to tell you that commercial real estate (CRE) is in trouble. Signs of meltdown are everywhere—not only in the headlines but in the empty storefronts and vacant office complexes from coast to coast. The causes are all too familiar: lending standards went out the window, banks loaned too much, buyers paid too much, lousy deals were avidly securitized, cash-flow projections entered Fantasyland, and unhealthy speculation fed widespread fraud. Everything we saw in housing, we're seeing here.

Boom-and-bust cycles of overbuilding and retrenchment are endemic to commercial real estate, so it's tempting to view this as just another post-expansion trough. Since prices have already slipped a staggering 40 percent from their 2006 peak, analysts calling this the bottom of the current cycle have some evidence on their side.

Yet beneath what appears to be a standard-issue retrenchment—brought on by a glut of inventory to work through, lenders avoiding risk instead of embracing it, and so on—structural changes in the U.S. economy may be changing the CRE landscape for good, and not in a positive direction. Once it collapses, this market may not bounce back.

This long-term structural decline is not just a problem for the real estate sector. With some \$1.7 trillion in CRE loans needing to be refinanced in the next few years, a continuing decline in

values could push the still-fragile banking system into a new crisis and send the economy back into recession as early as next year.

Steep losses and deeply underwater mortgages have many observers convinced that this is more than just a run-of-the-mill post-peak bust. The extremes reached in the boom were certainly epic: investors paid \$800,000 per resort hotel room and over \$500 per square foot for Class A office space, numbers no terrestrial cash flow could possibly justify. An unprecedented boom requires an equally unprecedented bust to work through the excesses in price, debt, and risk. So far so good, but there is an anecdotal body of evidence that suggests that vast changes are taking place in the U.S. economy that will reduce demand for commercial real estate for a decade, if not permanently.

A significant portion of CRE growth at the height of the boom was the result of the snake eating its own tail: as the FIRE economy (finance, insurance, real estate) expanded in the credit-bubble environment of low interest rates, high leverage, plentiful liquidity, and increased appetite for risk, it was only natural that real estate, financing, and construction companies' need for space exploded. The go-go years also fed a surge in the business-travel hospitality sector, while homeowners who felt rich after extracting some \$5 trillion in equity from their homes fueled a prodigious increase in resorts and related high-end retail space.

The net result was a CRE sector that needed the rarified air of an ever expanding credit bubble to sustain itself—the very acme of unsustainability. Now that the credit bubble excesses are gone, the industry has no foundation for future growth.

American shoppers won't be going on another spree anytime soon. Out of necessity, consumers are retrenching for the long haul. With the home-equity ATM broken, credit tightening, unemployment topping 10 percent, and their wealth reduced by some \$13 trillion in the past two years, consumers of all ages are changing their credit-dependent lifestyles. The 60-million-strong Baby Boomer generation is facing the sobering prospects of a much reduced retirement or no retirement at all: the only strategy with any guarantee of success is reducing spending and saving as much as possible.

These new consumer habits are reflected in falling consumer credit—a change of trend roughly equivalent to the Earth's gravitational field reversing polarity—and plummeting sales-tax receipts. The consequences for the retail sector, and by extension retail real estate, are dire. If this is the sea change in American spending that it appears to be, then retail may be overbuilt for a generation or, if online shopping continues to take market share from brick-and-mortar stores, perhaps permanently.

The old model of 5-year leases is already under pressure. The hot new

trend in retail is “pop-up shops” that unload excess inventory for a few weeks and then close. Desperate landlords are accepting the crumbs of a few weeks’ rent where they once demanded multi-year leases. And this isn’t just a low-end seasonal phenomenon: the Gap and Toys R Us are successfully using the pop-up model.

Similar trends are visible in the resort/leisure sector. Constrained consumers are no longer willing or able to plunk down \$250 or more a night for an upscale resort room, and once room rates drop below a certain threshold, highly leveraged hotels are no longer financially viable.

The built-in problem for all CRE is that as rents/occupancy/room rates decline, cash flow falls even faster. Just because occupancy is down doesn’t mean property taxes, mortgages, or maintenance costs drop accordingly. Thus the upscale Four Seasons Hualalai hotel on the Big Island of Hawaii saw its annual cash flow fall from \$20.6 million to \$7.9 million in two years—a massive 62 percent haircut that was almost double the 35 percent hit in occupancy rates.

With so many properties leveraged to the hilt, a decline in revenues sets off a wicked feedback loop: plummeting cash flows trigger a wave of forfeitures, foreclosures, and bankruptcies that add to a glut of distressed space that in turn only further depresses valuations and rents, leading to more foreclosures. If this were a typical recession, all this excess property would eventually be absorbed by new enterprises. But if the bubble era of ever rising consumer credit and spending is over, the vicious cycle can continue for years, once more dragging the financial sector and the rest of the economy into crisis.

Unprecedented access to low-interest credit and leverage fueled a real estate expansion into increasingly marginal locales—distant exurban

“new towns” far from jobs and tourist destinations without proven drawing power. As consumer credit and spending recede—recall that consumer spending is 70 percent of the entire U.S. GDP—large numbers of properties are left with little prospect for salvation. Whatever recovery does occur will begin with proven properties, and there is no guarantee the comeback will ever reach distant, marginal real estate.

There’s even more trouble on the horizon. The wave of creative destruction unleashed by the Internet has yet to envelop commercial office space—but it will. Just as online shopping has decimated retail sectors such as bookstores, the Web is busy revolutionizing white-collar work, the mainstay of office towers and business parks. Real work can now

and rented entire floors increasingly offer highly automated products and services. New-tech juggernaut Twitter recently leased more space in San Francisco as it was expanding its 30-person staff to maybe as high as—gasp!—100 employees. Will Twitter be filling that empty office tower near you? No, because its “service” is largely automated software.

These are 21st-century changes. But trends that took off in the 1990s may be contributing to a commercial real estate wipeout, too. Global wage arbitrage—that is, offshoring—continues eroding the need for domestic office space. The rising costs of doing business in the U.S. (where healthcare goes up 6 percent a year, rain or shine) drive enterprises to minimize permanent staff—and permanent office space.

NEW-TECH JUGGERNAUT TWITTER RECENTLY LEASED MORE SPACE IN SAN FRANCISCO AS IT WAS EXPANDING ITS 30-PERSON STAFF TO MAYBE AS HIGH AS—GASP!—100 EMPLOYEES.

be done remotely at a home office, café, or anywhere but a cubicle at headquarters, and the cost advantages of this flexibility will not be going away. Yes, there are still powerful reasons to meet in person, but there are equally powerful reasons to downsize travel and office costs permanently.

Structural changes in the economy are increasing self-employment and contract labor and shrinking the scale of new enterprises. Millions of well-educated Americans already work from home, and since the average U.S. house has grown in size over the past 50 years, freelancers and self-employed professionals have plenty of rent-free space at their disposal. High-growth companies that once hired hundreds of employees

All of these developments reinforce one another, leading to an even gloomier picture for commercial real estate than for housing. The glut in homes will clear eventually, but office space, retail locations, and travel destinations will never again be what they were in the past decade. And as the CRE market comes tumbling down, we might find ourselves reliving the crisis of the past year—if we’re lucky. This isn’t the next bubble, it’s the last bubble’s big brother, and it’s huge. ■

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Bombs Without Borders

Bernard Kouchner's prescription for war

By John Laughland

THE HISTORY of neoconservatism has been well documented as a trajectory from Left to Right and specifically from anti-Stalinist Left to pro-war and anti-conservative Right. The story is usually told about Americans because, of course, it is in the United States that the movement has become strongest. But the phenomenon has long existed in Europe, too. Just look at the foreign minister of France, Bernard Kouchner.

Kouchner was appointed to one of France's highest offices of state in 2007 by the newly elected president, Nicolas Sarkozy. He had supported Sarkozy's Socialist opponent during the campaign, as he was a member of the Socialist Party and had served only in Socialist governments in the past. (His party duly expelled him for accepting the new job.) But Kouchner is not just an opportunist who jumped ship. He is a self-styled progressive who has systematically supported war, supposedly for humanitarian purposes, ever since the late 1960s. His partnership with the neocon Sarkozy was quite natural.

In February of last year, however, Kouchner's reputation came under attack after Pierre Péan, a leading French investigative journalist, published an exposé entitled *Le Monde Selon K*. Péan charged Kouchner with all sorts of political, ideological, and financial malfeasance. The book caused a sensation in Paris. Firing back, Kouchner suggested that Péan harbored an anti-Semitic hatred against him and rallied important friends to his defense, including Secretary of State Hillary Clin-

ton. Fashionable neocon *litterateur* Bernard Henri Lévy called Péan "a dwarf."

The sourness of the response was not surprising. Kouchner is well liked in France. He is one of that strange breed of politician that manages to cultivate the image of not really being a politician at all. Instead, he is widely credited as a doctor, his other profession, even though he has been in politics longer. Indeed, he has blended his two callings into one.

Kouchner cut his medico-political teeth in Biafra, the province of Nigeria where a vicious war of secession broke out in 1967. Although a member of the Communist Party at the time, he remained strangely aloof from the events of May 1968, denouncing them as "an individualist revolution." In August of that year, the newly qualified doctor replied to a newspaper advertisement calling for medics to go to Biafra under the auspices of the Red Cross. He was there by the beginning of September, and this was to prove his baptism of fire.

Kouchner and his colleagues did good work, but their sympathy for the victims of war quickly turned into active military support for the Biafran cause. An embargo on flights having been broken by Caritas and the Red Cross, planes carrying arms duly flew in from neighboring Gabon alongside the ones carrying medical supplies. In a highly unethical confusion of medicine and politics—one that was to form the cornerstone of Kouchner's career for decades to come—he and his Red Cross

colleagues looked the other way, occasionally used the military planes themselves, and called for their hospital staff to be armed so they could better fight for Biafran independence.

In other words, for Kouchner, neutral humanitarianism was rubbish. The war was a just cause that had to be fought for. In a semi-anonymous interview given to an African newspaper, "Dr. K." denounced the very concept of neutrality on which the Red Cross had operated ever since its creation more than 100 years previously. He called for the Geneva Conventions to be changed so that medics could take sides in war. At the end of 1968, Kouchner openly transformed his physician's role into an activist one when he created the Committee for the Fight Against the Genocide in Biafra. He denounced "the horrors of this conflict perpetrated by Lagos in league with imperialist powers." The French doctor's personal brand of atrocity propaganda was born.

When Biafra fell to Nigerian forces in January 1970, Kouchner wrote an article replete with exaggerations and oversimplifications, saying that the Biafran "genocide" was the worst massacre in the world since the Holocaust. He was to reuse this simple formula on many occasions. The fact that his battle for Biafra coincided exactly with the geopolitical support de Gaulle's government was then giving to the Biafrans (against the support given to Nigeria by Britain and America) did not bother him. Nor did the fact that both sides were fighting for control of the oil reserves off the

Nigerian coast. In his article, Kouchner—who had always admired de Gaulle’s minister of culture, André Malraux, precisely because he had fought with the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War—attacked the Left for having abandoned the concept of “a people’s war” (*la guerre populaire*) and adopting what he denounced as a smug and morally disgraceful pacifism.

It was the political militancy of those doctors who made friends during the Biafran war and who remained in touch once back in Paris that led to the creation of “Médecins Sans Frontières” (Doctors Without Borders) in 1972. The idea was to create a “commando” of doctors who could travel at short notice to conflict zones. (Note the military metaphor of the sort that Kouchner was to use throughout his life, for instance, in his autobiographical *Warriors of Peace*.)

THE FACT THAT **SCORES OF PEOPLE WERE KILLED** WHEN THE DROPS FELL ON THEIR HEADS OR INTO MINEFIELDS **DID NOT BOTHER KOUCHNER.**

While some of the members wanted to perform short urgent missions and others longer-term ones, Kouchner’s position was the most radical of all. What mattered to him was the media. Kouchner loved nothing more than promoting a cause—and himself in the process. He eventually stormed out of MSF in 1979 and created a new association, *Médecins du Monde* (Doctors of the World) in 1980. Demographer Emmanuel Todd nicknamed Kouchner’s new group “Soldiers Without Borders” in 2007, in an article wondering what sort of a physician systematically prefers war to peace.

The bad blood between MSF and Kouchner has persisted for decades. In 2008, for instance, the man who had by then become French foreign minister said that French NGO’s were keeping

him informed about the situation in the Gaza Strip and affording him a channel of contact with Hamas. The claim instantly put the French organizations’ work in jeopardy. The president of MSF issued a furious denial and returned a donation of 120,000 euros that it had just received from Kouchner’s ministry. In spite of this, Kouchner has managed to maintain the illusion that he is still somehow connected to MSF.

Nine years after he created *Médecins du Monde*, Kouchner was rewarded for his politico-humanitarian activism by being appointed secretary of state for humanitarian action in the government of the newly re-elected Socialist president François Mitterrand. Having served de Gaulle’s policy in the past, Kouchner served the new regime with equal ease. He vocally supported the first Gulf War in 1991, in spite of its unpopularity in

France, and he looked the other way as the Coalition bombed Iraq into a humanitarian catastrophe. He attacked in the press those “pacifists who are happy to accommodate the methods of the strongman of Baghdad, thereby comforting one of the bloodiest dictatorships on earth.” He called for French foreign policy to be based on “morality” and denounced opponents of his policy as Communists, Greens, and even anti-Semites. He was the first to formulate the “right of intervention” in the war’s aftermath and organized an airdrop of food and aid to the Iraqi Kurds.

Like so many of Kouchner’s stunts, this one was bitterly attacked, not only by his numerous rivals within government but by then honorary president of MSF, Xavier Emmanuelli, who wrote of his disgust at seeing genuine suffering

transformed by Kouchner into a spectacle for domestic television consumption. In order to publicize the drops of food aid, journalists and heavy broadcasting equipment were transported to remote Kurdish villages so that the “generosity” could be filmed and beamed all over the world. The fact that fights broke out over the aid packages and that scores of people were killed when the drops fell on their heads or into minefields did not bother Kouchner. He later adorned the front cover of his book with a photograph of himself looking out of the window of a helicopter, apparently at Kurdistan, wearing the concerned expression of an Olympian humanitarian.

In 1992, Kouchner took up the cause of Somalia. He organized a campaign in all of France’s 74,000 schools in which every child was asked to bring a kilogram of rice to school for starving Somalis. The project was run with the Ministry of Education, the French railroad network SNCF, and the Post Office. When the rice was delivered to East Africa, Kouchner made sure the TV cameras were there. It was here that he staged one of his most notorious publicity stunts, when he rolled up his trousers and waded into the water to carry bags of rice onto the beach on his back. This was but the “humanitarian” curtain-raiser to what would become the disastrous U.S. expedition to Somalia, “Operation Restore Hope,” which started the very day of the broadcast, Dec. 5, 1992.

Not coincidentally, Kouchner also took a high-profile position on the Bosnian war, just as the United States and fashionable opinion were swinging behind the Muslim cause. In June 1992, three months into the war, Kouchner and Mitterrand flew to Sarajevo, a surprise visit that hugely strengthened Kouchner’s position within the government. When the story about Serbian “concentration camps” broke in August,

Kouchner was in his element: good versus evil based on ridiculous parallels with the Nazi Holocaust. In early 1993, *Médecins du Monde* spent an estimated \$2 million on a publicity campaign demonizing the Serbs, using the controversial pictures of the Omarska camp taken by the British channel ITN and including posters showing pictures of Hitler and Milosevic in case anyone had missed the point. Kouchner was later to admit that the campaign he sponsored had been based on a lie. In *Warriors of Peace*, Kouchner recounts a conversation with the dying Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic, who admitted in 2003 that the camps had not been “extermination camps” at all and that he had pretended otherwise in order to curry sympathy and military support from the West.

PÉAN SHOWS HOW KOUCHNER’S CLAIMS TO HAVE VISITED A TUTSI MASSACRE SITE IN 1994 WERE PRECISELY WRONG: THE KILLINGS IN THAT PARTICULAR VILLAGE WERE IN FACT COMMITTED BY TUTSIS AGAINST HUTUS.

But it was over the Rwanda genocide in 1994 that Kouchner started to make serious enemies in France. One of them was Pierre Péan. A veteran journalist who has written books on a wide range of subjects, including an excellent account of François Mitterrand’s youthful work for the Vichy government, Péan disagreed violently with the popular view of Rwanda. He did not deny that Hutus had killed Tutsis in large numbers, but he insisted that the reverse was also true. He further resented, like many others, the political instrumentalization of the genocide to blacken France’s name.

Péan produced a book on Rwanda and became an implacable opponent of the RPF regime in Kigali under President Paul Kagame. Péan branded Kagame a dictator and a mass murderer

and noted that the Rwandan government had on several occasions formally accused France of complicity in the genocide. Diplomatic relations with France were broken off in 2006 when a French judge issued arrest warrants for members of Kagame’s entourage on the basis that the president ordered the assassination of the two Hutu presidents (of Rwanda and Burundi) in April 1994, the event that all agree sparked the conflict. Following his close study of the Rwanda story, Péan turned his ire directly on Kouchner to produce *Le Monde Selon K*.

It is easy to see why Péan’s book caused a stir. His chapter on Kouchner and Rwanda is particularly effective and full of anger. With meticulous attention to detail and use of maps, Péan shows how Kouchner’s claims to have visited a

nels in the group specifically forbids it from becoming the voice of the Foreign Ministry.) She is also a regular invitee to the meetings of the Bilderberg Group and the European Council on Foreign Relations, a very rare honor for a hack.

Péan accuses Ockrent of being incompetent and of sacking journalists for political reasons. These claims are a little tendentious, and he mars them by prurient and irrelevant attacks on Ockrent’s (admittedly enormous) income. He concludes his hatchet job by piling up allegations of simple cynicism on Kouchner’s part. For instance, the great campaigner’s company, B.K. Consulting, was paid 25,000 euros by the French oil company Total to produce a report supporting its construction projects in Burma, a country whose regime Kouchner had denounced in 1994 as “a narcodictatorship.” Péan also alleges that, when he became a member of the European Parliament in 1994, Kouchner deliberately registered his holiday house in Corsica as his permanent address so that he could cash in on extra travel expenses.

Péan’s attack on Kouchner is uneven and marred by some inaccuracies. But his argument is sound. Kouchner has for the last 40 years consistently supported war as the means to solve humanitarian problems. He is a virulent interventionist who denounces his opponents as accomplices of dictators. This no doubt explains the cover photograph of Péan’s book. It shows Kouchner standing in a slightly strained posture of camaraderie with George W. Bush, each man with his arm clasped over the other’s shoulder. Kouchner stares up admiringly at the man who embodies his political ideals—or perhaps the man whose ideals Kouchner invented. ■

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Unsafe at Any Creed

It was 1995, a scant four years after the District's crack-era murder wave crested and broke. We were still living in the spume. (1991 saw 482 murders in city limits, '95

a mere 36. In four years I guess we grew some weak little gangsters.) I was in high school, on my way to a hip-hop show in Brookland, a pretty but rough-hewn Northeast enclave by the Catholic University of America. It was a grim winter night, darkness stiff as ice; an acetone wind burned in my nostrils. A scurf of dirty snow clung to the gutters, soaking through the duct tape patching the soles of my thrift-store high heels. Two blocks from the Metro, the place looked like the Cold War had broken the wrong way. The streets were lightless, neglected, empty. I got lost.

After an unpleasant interlude of skidding on black ice and stumbling into pot-holes, I ran across three friendly white folks, CUA students who'd foundered on some unshriven streetcorner. I told them where I was going—they'd never heard of it—and then gave the address. The girl's eyes got big. "Oh—are you sure? You want to go there?"

She then gave me some of the worst advice I have ever received from a non-professional: "Here's how you get there, but while you're walking, keep your head down and walk as fast as you can!"

Did this chick want me to get mugged? Why not baste myself in heroin? Yes, the best advice when traveling through a shaky neighborhood is to keep your head down, ensuring that you are less aware of your surroundings, and act like you don't belong. The shutters came down over my face and I headed off to my concert, bemused and a bit smug.

For once, pride bore no connection to a fall. The locals were cordial and the show adequate. My corner encounter, the trailer for "The Row Houses Have Eyes," is the only thing I can now recall from that night, and until I became Catholic, it was my only experience in Brookland.

After my conversion, I got to know a different side of the university and of the neighborhood. Catholics and their institutions marble Brookland like fat in meat. There's the university, of course, but also the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, blue and white domes curving like folded wings, where you can stand just outside the crypt church and hear Masses in three languages at once. There's the Dominican House of Studies, Philip Larkin's "serious house on serious earth," thronged with habits. The place is blindingly sincere. Driving down into the valley where the Basilica nests is like entering another country, an alternate-history America where Fr. Junipero Serra and Lord Baltimore take the places of Ben Franklin and George Washington. If my high-school experience of Brookland was the bass, this confection of piety might be the treble.

Because I have what Max Weber might have called a Catholic work ethic, and where others have gifts of prayer or healing I have a charism of failure, I've frequently availed myself of the university chapel's late-night Sunday Mass. When even 5 PM is too early to claw my way into consciousness, there's always the 9 o'clock at CUA. Despite the hour,

the chapel fills with well-scrubbed teens happily doing what Protestants call "fellowshipping." It's unsettling.

A college chapel is a misshapen thing compared to a parish church. A few years of the lifespan are swollen to gargantuan proportions, and the rest of the generations are hardly represented. Or compare the chapel to a book, where the parish church is a medieval text illuminated with every kind of monk and monkey, a wild efflorescence of weirdness, gargoyle and infant and dog-headed man, the college chapel is a well-kept textbook where the most diligent student in the class has taken careful notes in earnest handwriting.

These good students stroll in and out of the darkness in clusters. A skinny sweater-clad hipster boy shares a hymnal with his friend. The priest gives the only really great homily I've heard in my life: he spins a tale of pitching the stigmata to Protestant tourists in Assisi, then tells these sweet-faced undergraduates that they must suffer with Christ to love Christ. We have definitely entered Bizarro America. The kids love this gospel-of-austerity line.

Outside, after church, I hike back up the hill toward the Metro. A weary security guard gives me a wave. Brookland still isn't the safest part of town; I had brunch with students living in an idyll of gentle hills and heard stories of muggings practically on their front stoop. But maybe Catholic University shouldn't be in the safest part of town. As long as you don't keep your head down, and don't walk too fast, you'll be okay. ■

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Spinning Out of Control

The Pentagon propaganda plan to win hearts and minds—of Americans

By Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

IT WASN'T a good day for the Department of Defense when *Stars and Stripes* scooped the Pentagon's secret scheme to profile journalists covering the war. Seems that the Rendon Group—the tyrannosaurus rex of military public-relations contractors—was getting paid to weed out reporters who did not fit the command's ideal of tractability.

The Army and Rendon have vociferously denied that embed requests were being held up on this basis, despite subsequent revelations of two confirmed cases to the contrary and reports by individual journalists who obtained their Rendon-generated profiles.

Seeing an exposé of these practices was akin to spotting a tiny glitch in the virtual-reality world of "The Matrix" and getting a glimpse of the reality underneath. What lies beneath here is a powerful engine that propels our war machine. This Matrix is the construct of military "Strategic Communications," a rubric that covers everything from military public affairs to public diplomacy to information operations. "Info ops" (IO) in turn include battlefield intelligence, some forms of electronic warfare, psychological operations (PSYOPS), military deception, and anything in these broad areas that serves to sell, manage, and manipulate the preferred messaging of the military. This massive complex is as expensive as it is complicated. But more importantly, notes author and war correspondent Robert Young Pelton, "it doesn't work."

It hasn't worked in Iraq or Afghanistan or anywhere else in the Muslim world because locals have long developed an immunity against American mil-

itary attempts to win them over. "If they see thousands of people getting killed, they react to that more than a school being built," Pelton says. Therein lies the trouble with trying to conduct public diplomacy at gunpoint.

Critics charge that Strategic Communications, or "StratComm," is also ill-fated because at its core it's all about us—generating the right kind of news over there to stoke support for the war enterprise back here. When self-sustaining interests come first, military planners lose sight of what the Iraqi and Afghan people are really thinking. They never gain their trust, a key pillar in the counterinsurgency mission.

"Strategic Communications is not just 'shaping information' and needless internal churn, it's a process designed to constantly justify the reason for the Department of Defense to be in this war," charges Pelton, author of *Licensed to Kill: Hired Guns in the War on Terror*. He has worked on both sides of the wire, as an embed and independent journalist and as a private consultant for the International Security Assistance Force.

"It's become its own industry," Pelton adds. "It's crossed the line from countering propaganda and allowing access to shaping propaganda and shaping what journalists do. It's a monstrous system of controlling bits of information and misleading people," and despite anti-propaganda laws and compartmentalization, the mission and the message are the same overseas and stateside.

Understanding the breadth of StratComm as it has developed over the last 10 years is a challenge in itself. Accord-

ing to an Associated Press investigation, the military increased its spending on "winning hearts and minds at home and abroad" 63 percent over five years, for a total of \$4.7 billion in 2009 alone. That includes \$1.6 billion for military recruitment and advertising and \$547 million for public affairs.

These domestic activities provide jobs for 27,000 employees. Think of the slick media campaigns and provocative video games designed to lure potential warriors to recruiting offices. Then there's the steroidal "war porn" generated by the Pentagon Channel and its surrogates in other niche media markets, like the Military and History Channels. During the Bush administration, there was a 50 percent increase in prepackaged videos, press releases, and radio interviews handed to news networks by DoD's "Hometown News." These press kits were often published and broadcast as original reporting with no Pentagon byline.

"We have such a massive apparatus selling the military to us, it has become hard to ask questions about whether this is too much money," Sheldon Rampton, research director of the Center for Media and Democracy, told the AP.

Meanwhile, overseas StratComm spans a sprawling public-affairs and information-operations network. According to Matt Armstrong, a popular StratComm blogger and Washington consultant, PSYOPS are typically employed to change the behavior of a key audience or adversary. About 60 percent are "white ops," he said, while 40 percent are "gray" or "black," meaning they are tactical and

covert, and we don't hear about them until long after the fact, if at all.

Some IO activities can be silly and counterproductive, like when the Lincoln Group was paid upward of \$100 million to plant fabricated pro-American "good news" stories in Iraqi newspapers. They can include dropping leaflets with messages from the military, producing millions of dollars worth of Westernized commercials, or jamming an enemy's cellphones or media broadcasts.

IO activities can also be more dubious, sources say, like planting rumors in villages to smoke out the enemy or hiring private "media" consultants to gather "atmospherics" (physical and human intelligence) eventually used as tactical information by the military.

A Pentagon IO official who spoke with *TAC* on condition of anonymity insisted that the military is not in the business of deliberately deceiving civilians. "We don't do this 'black ops' thing," he said. If it is done, that's the "role and mission of other agencies."

Much of the StratComm budget is classified, eliciting a great deal of suspicion. Pelton calls StratComm a "huge slush fund" that invites "giant boondoggles" within the defense industry. And there's been little change with the new administration. "Where does the money go? Even though I have expertise in that area, I don't know," he says.

Members of Congress have asked similar questions over the years. In 2008, Sen. James Webb (D-Va.) called on the Pentagon to shut down the \$300 million contract the Lincoln Group once shared with other private firms to engage in media outreach in Iraq. He demanded a closer look into the programs and decried the dramatic expansion of such contracts under President Bush. "It makes little sense for the U.S. Department of Defense to be spending hundreds of millions of dollars to propagandize the Iraqi people," Webb wrote.

In 2005, Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.) asked whether the military was propagandizing the American people, breaching the barriers set up by the 61-year-old Smith-Mundt Act and its subsequent amendments in 1972 and 1985, which restrict U.S. government propaganda on domestic soil. Jones had been troubled by reports that the Bush administration had hired Rendon to help sell the 2001 invasion of Iraq to the American people. The congressman's questions led to a DoD Inspector General's report that focused on Rendon's government contracts from 2000 to 2005—a staggering \$95.8 million in work orders over five years. In the end, inspectors "did not find evidence that the DoD hired [Rendon] to deliberately create conditions that would convince the American people and Congress that Iraq was an imminent threat" or that Rendon's activities violated "DoD policy or legal requirements." The report revealed a surprising number of military contracts for one company—46 total—for work ranging from consulting services and foreign-media analysis to "creating websites" and "public outreach programs." The report never directly mentioned the "propaganda warfare" associated with founder John Rendon, as reported in James Bamford's award-winning *Rolling Stone* article "The Man Who Sold the War" in 2005. (When reached by *TAC*, a Rendon spokesman offered a sharp, unsolicited rebuke of the four-year-old Bamford article, pointing out that the IG report vindicated Rendon.)

Jones was not impressed with the IG's findings and doesn't consider Rendon cleared. "It was always really hard to get to the goal line," he said of the investigation, which was frustrated by a lack of participation by the military and civilian players.

So it seems that Smith-Mundt has finally run up against a real test: satellites, the Internet, and a global media allow real-time access to foreign infor-

mation, including propaganda. What was being sold to Iraqis was conveniently absorbed by American audiences, too, leading critics like Jones to believe that private companies, or "covert perception managers" like Rendon, were feeding off U.S. tax dollars to drum up domestic support for an unnecessary war.

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld attempted to establish an "Office of Strategic Influence" to create a hub for IO—a sort of propaganda HQ—to "influence hearts and minds" in favor of the new Global War on Terror. Despite assurances by Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith that DoD "doesn't do covert action, period," there was a brief but effective uproar over the propagandistic feel of the plan, and the operation was shut down. A year later, a sour Rumsfeld promised that his ideas would persevere. "And then there was the Office of Strategic Influence," he told an audience in November 2002, "And oh my goodness gracious, isn't that terrible, Henny Penny the sky is going to fall. I went down that next day and said, fine, if you want to savage this thing fine, I'll give you the corpse. There's the name. You can have the name, but I'm gonna keep doing every single thing that needs to be done, and I have. [W]hat was intended to be done by that office is being done ... not by that office [but] in other ways."

When *New York Times* writer David Barstow blew the lid off of the Pentagon's "message force multiplier" program in April 2008, it was clear Rumsfeld's boasts weren't empty. But unlike the intended audience of Rumsfeld's ill-fated PSYOPS command center, the program Barstow revealed was clearly designed to influence the American people, and it was as deceptive as any propaganda-dropping overseas.

According to Barstow's Pulitzer Prize-winning investigation, the Pentagon had

groomed a coterie of retired military officers with similar ideological allegiances, seeming credibility, and media acumen to sell the war to Americans by playing objective military analysts on TV. Turns out they were regurgitating Pentagon talking points and helping to frame the war the way the military wanted Americans to view events in Iraq. In exchange, these retired officers, who serve on the boards of military contractors, received golden access to senior defense officials inhabiting the Pentagon's "E Ring"—and beyond.

"Records and interviews show how the Bush Administration has used its control over access and information in an effort to transform the analysts into a kind of media Trojan horse—an instrument intended to shape terrorism coverage from inside the major TV and radio networks," Barstow wrote. The analysts represented "more than 150 military contractors either as lobbyists, senior executives, board members or consultants ... scrambling for hundreds of billions in military business." This was StratComm at its best: three powerful interests—politicians, the military, and the defense industry—whose very survival was cleaved to the Long War, working together with a compliant corporate media to create elaborate theater for the American public.

Individuals working in the StratComm community today admit the Bush administration's early attempts at waging this new "global conflict of perception" were clunky, expensive, and in many cases undermined the mission completely. On top of that, the military seemed totally inept at responding to serious controversies of its own making, like the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in 2004.

All of this qualifies for "lessons learned," says Armstrong, who is part of a growing movement of StratComm strategists and advocates who say the next generation—shaped by a post-surge counterinsurgency mentality and

a new administration—is smarter, more professional, and relies on truth rather than expensive gimmickry.

"They're getting it. They understand that they can't make people feel they are being snowed. You can't lie to them. But you can't wait for someone to come to you with questions. You have to be pre-active, as well as pro-active," he said.

For Armstrong, it's not a question of whether StratComm works or should be used, it's a matter of making it better, taking advantage of new media such as blogs and YouTube, investing in local media instead of producing it, and "engaging information" rather than trying to control it. But he is ambivalent about limiting the scope of StratComm. Armstrong even advocates repealing the "quaint and misunderstood" Smith-Mundt propaganda law, which he argued in the *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, "restricts ... much of the government ... from conducting effective message campaigns in a global media environment," and has been "widely over-applied to effectively silence much of the government's potential for responding and neutralizing enemy propaganda."

"Think of [StratComm] in terms of counterinsurgency," said Michael Doran, Bush deputy secretary of defense for public diplomacy. "Information is right at the heart of this war. On the Hill, I think there is still a lot of misunderstanding about this. There are a lot of good intentions but bad information. If you want better oversight over this, you can do it."

Both men insist the DoD was forced to take over public diplomacy because the State Department was unable to step up. Indeed, defense spending dwarfs international-affairs outlays by a ratio of 17 to 1, according to national-security expert Lawrence Korb. So while the military says it does not want to bear the brunt, public diplomacy in its many forms will become a permanent part of the Armed Forces within the expanding StratComm

enterprise. "We have some formal processes in place and we're starting to pour cement into them," said the IO defense official who spoke with TAC.

Not everyone is comfortable with this. The House Armed Services and Appropriations Committees have been teasing apart the shadowy StratComm budget, which includes an eye-popping \$626 million for IO in fiscal year 2010.

"What is this money going for? How does it support the mission? It's not been a very comforting exercise," said one congressional staffer. "No one has asked questions about this in the past, it's all been rubber-stamped."

According to the FY 2010 National Defense Authorization Act, funding for StratComm and IO has reached "at least" \$10 billion since the 9/11 attacks, prompting "concerns" about oversight. The 2010 House defense appropriations bill included this note: "At face value, much of what is being produced appears to be United States military propaganda, public relations, and behavioral modifications messaging. The Committee questions the effectiveness of much of the material being produced with this funding."

One could say the Matrix is working—if you assume that it is all about persuading the domestic audience, particularly the Washington power elite that controls the purse strings, to maintain current military policies. Polls suggest that Americans still support the war on terror and expanding DoD budgets. The White House is poised to put more troops into Afghanistan. Billions of dollars for StratComm activities evidently count for something—if not winning the hearts and minds of millions of Afghans and Iraqis, then securing the commitment of American citizens, which may have been the plan all along. ■

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Strange Bird

John James Audubon was a terrible writer and a cruel conservationist, but his vision still took flight.

By Harry Mount

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON, author of *The Birds of America* and patron saint of American wildlife, was, to tell the truth, an awful writer. His spoken English was strongly accented with the French of Haiti, where he was born in 1785 to a Spanish Creole mother and a father who ran a sugar plantation. By his own admission, his written English was a lot worse than his written French, which was pretty bad, too.

It's best to take a few indigestion tablets when you tackle the raw text of his prose, before it was edited by William MacGillivray, his Scottish collaborator. Here he is on the Ruby-throated Hummingbird:

No sooner has the vivifying orb began to warn of spring once more the season, and caused millions of plants to spread the beauties of its benefiting rays, than the little hummingbird is seen advancing on fairy wings, visiting carefully every opening calix and like an anxious florist, remove from each of them the injurious Insects...

Even though he gave his name to America's leading wildlife preservation charity, the National Audubon Society, he could hardly be called much of a wildlife campaigner, either. He was disappointed if he shot fewer than 100 birds a day. When he went in search of the Brown Pelicans of the Florida Keys in 1832, he wanted to kill 25 in order to draw a single male bird. He said of the trip, "I really believe I would have shot

one hundred of these reverend sirs, had not a mistake taken place in the reloading of my gun."

Later, on the same trip, bored of killing birds, he took to spraying the alligators with gunshot, noting how the brains of one leapt out of its head and exploded in midair. Audubon was rarely painted without a gun nestling in his hands, often with gundog at his side. So how did this semiliterate, bloodthirsty man end up producing *The Birds of America*, one of the great American wildlife books?

The answer is, of course, his 435 pictures, published in 87 sections between 1827 and 1838. It was their beauty, yes, but, most originally, their size—life size—that did it. Audubon insisted on printing in the punishingly expensive Double Elephant folio format, with its 39 x 26 inch pages. Original subscribers paid an elephantine \$1,000 for *The Birds of America*, the equivalent of about \$17,000 now. A later miniature edition was a bestseller, too, but it was still drawing on the success of its mammoth predecessor. The full-size book was perhaps the finest picture book ever made—a copy in good condition was sold at Christie's in 2000 for \$8,802,500, a world record for any printed book.

Surpassingly beautiful as Audubon's bird pictures are, his skills as an artist were limited. His human portraits—his principal source of income after he went bankrupt and was sent to prison in Louisville, Kentucky for debt in 1819—

are awkward and ill-proportioned. His birds, though, are far more accomplished and much more lifelike than the cold, stuffed still lifes—or still deaths—painted by earlier artists, including his chief rival, Alexander Wilson, the Scot who compiled the nine-volume *American Ornithology* between 1808 and 1814.

It's easy to see why Audubon was better with birds than people. He was obsessed with their behavior before they flitted into his crosshairs. In 1804, he carried out the first known bird banding, on some peewees in Pennsylvania, tying "a light, silver thread on the leg of each, loose enough not to hurt the part, but so fastened that no exertion of theirs could remove it."

His desperation to record the birds in pencil and watercolor was all-consuming, too. On his trip to Labrador in 1833 to capture (in both senses of the word) puffins, auks, guillemots, and Black-headed Gulls, he developed a kind of paralysis in his shoulders, neck, and fingers from all the drawing.

On top of his close observation of birds, Audubon insisted on painting his subjects almost immediately after death. A former taxidermist, he was adamant that the bird must be painted unstuffed, posed on wires very soon after it was killed or while it was still alive; he didn't mind if the bird was in agony as long as he got its live plumage right. "I have ascertained that feathers lose their brilliancy almost as rapidly as flesh or skin itself," he wrote in 1832 in St. Augustine, Florida, "and am of the opinion that a

bird alive is 75 percent more rich in colors than 24 hours after its death.”

When he didn't paint them fresh, his likenesses suffered. His picture of the Brunnich's Murre, a thick-billed sea bird, looks flat and stiff—not unlike his human subjects—because he painted from a specimen that had been sent to him packed in ice. His Hawk Owls, which he never saw in the wild and had to be sent from Canada, look a little embarrassed, too.

Some critics complain that Audubon's determination to fill the birds with life meant they ended up with practically human expressions—more human than the people whose portraits he painted. Certainly, one of his Pileated Woodpeckers—painted in Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania, gobbling caterpillars and pecking away at a branch—looks almost Disneyish in its animated row with another woodpecker.

IT ACES THE HEART TO LOOK AT AUDUBON'S PICTURE OF THE CAROLINA PARAKEETS, PAINTED IN LOUISIANA IN 1825. THE LAST OF THE SPECIES DIED IN 1914.

He did take liberties with the truth. His Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are depicted in a flock of 12—highly unusual for the species—because Europeans were so keen on the birds that they wanted to see them in all sorts of poses. On the whole, however, it's the real-life atmosphere of the paintings—even if it's mixed with a little showmanship and aw-shucks-ain't-that-sweetness—that gives Audubon an edge.

He painted House Wrens feeding their three young in a battered old top hat, snagged on a branch. A Summer Red Bird swallows a fat black beetle; Purple Grackles munch a half-eaten corn cob; a Whooping Crane flips over a baby alligator for lunch. His White-headed Eagle grasps a catfish in its talons. A Trumpeter Swan is actually trumpeting. He

was criticized by ornithologists for all this animation, in particular for painting mockingbirds on a tree with a rattlesnake, its fangs curled outward. Rattlesnakes didn't climb trees, they said, and their fangs never curled outward. They turned out to be wrong. Audubon 2, ornithologists 0.

The birds' surroundings, often painted by George Lehman, are also crucial to Audubon's most successful pictures—like the wildflowers that frame his meadowlarks or the luscious palm trees of the Florida Keys, used as a backdrop for the Louisiana Heron. All this was very daring, a touch of Barnum and Bailey livening up the clinical world of ornithological art. That daring was the silver lining to Audubon's vanity—he was tremendously keen on his looks, on his mass of thick ringlets and his leather frontiersman's clothes, lovingly caught in several self-portraits.

Like a lot of egomaniacs, Audubon was a disastrous businessman and particularly useless with other people's money. His steam-mill business in Henderson, Kentucky went the way of his taxidermy and portrait-painting careers—belly-up, taking the fortunes of several investors with it, including that of George Keats, brother of the poet. John Keats wrote to his brother, saying, “I cannot help thinking Mr. Audubon a dishonest man. Why did he make you believe him a Man of Property? How is it his circumstances have altered so suddenly? I cannot help thinking Audubon has deceived you. I shall not like the sight of him.”

Most self-centered types are too wrapped up in themselves to turn their inner eye outward. Yet after half a lifetime

of failure, Audubon, at the age of 35 in 1820, did manage to channel his frustration into the project of his life, heading off from New Orleans towards Cincinnati.

As the watercolors piled up, so did the corpses; on his first day, he shot 30 partridges, a woodcock, 27 gray squirrels, a Barn Owl, a turkey buzzard, and a Rump-yellow Warbler. Today, it aches the heart to look at Audubon's picture of the Carolina Parakeets, painted in Louisiana in 1825. The last of the species died in 1914 in the Cincinnati Zoo; the last Passenger Pigeon died there, too, in the same year.

Still, things have gotten better in recent years, not least because of the National Audubon Society, founded in 1905. Among the society's triumphs are the survival of the Greater Flamingo of southern Florida, the puffins on Eastern Egg Rock off the coast of Maine, the Whooping Crane (at 5 feet, America's tallest bird), the Bald Eagle, the Peregrine Falcon, the California Condor, the Spotted Owl, the Cerulean Warbler, and the Red Knot.

The revival of birdlife is being encouraged across the country, not least near Minnie's Land, the house on the Hudson River that Audubon bought with his royalties not long before his death in 1851. His 35-acre plot has now been swallowed up by Washington Heights, New York City, from 155th to 158th Street, between the Hudson and Amsterdam Avenue. The deer, elk, moose, foxes, wolves, and bears have all gone, but the birds are flourishing.

Next time you're in New York, take one of the boat trips organized by the National Audubon Society. You will see Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Glossy Ibises, Cormorants, Great Black-backed Gulls, and Night Herons—all roosting within a wing's flap of the Empire State Building. ■

Harry Mount is author of Carpe Diem: Put A Little Latin in Your Life, among other books.

Arts & Letters

BOOKS

[*The Death and Life of American Journalism: The Media Revolution That Will Begin the World Again*, Robert McChesney and John Nichols, Nation Books, 352 pages]

Black & White & Red All Over

By Bill Steigerwald

IN 1948, Ray Sprigle of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* pulled off a great, daring, and long-forgotten feat of newspaper journalism. Sprigle, a very white German-American of 61, disguised himself as a black man and traveled undercover through the South to experience what daily life was like for the 9 million blacks living under Jim Crow.

Thirteen years before the book *Black Like Me*, the *Post-Gazette*'s star reporter "lived, slept and ate like a Negro" for 30 days as he was guided from Savannah to the Mississippi Delta by a prominent black civic leader from Atlanta. Sprigle returned to Pittsburgh and wrote a 21-part series on his 3,000-mile road trip, blasting the South's system of lawful segregation for what he said it was—iniquitous, immoral, and unconstitutional.

Sprigle's powerfully written first-person series made no pretense of fairness, balance, or objectivity. It was syn-

dicated by the *Post-Gazette* to only 15 papers—all north of the Mason-Dixon Line. But it was widely read and commented on by the chattering class and sparked one of the first national media debates about the need to dismantle the South's shameful apartheid.

The authors of *The Death and Life of American Journalism* would have cheered every impassioned word of Sprigle's work—even though Sprigle was a staunch small-government conservative and they are a pair of Big Government-hugging progressives. Robert McChesney, the cofounder of the liberal Free Press media reform group, and John Nichols, the Washington correspondent for *The Nation*, would also be the first to tell you that the chances of anyone at a daily newspaper today doing great journalism like Sprigle did are very close to zero.

The reason for that sad fact, McChesney and Nichols say, is that America's newspapers are dying and they are taking the good journalism that America needs with them to their graves. Daily newspapers are "in free-fall collapse," they argue in their new how-to guide to fixing what they say is the country's "crisis in journalism." "The entire commercial news-media system is disintegrating," they write. "Wall Street and Madison Avenue are abandoning the production of journalism en masse. Our nation faces the absurd and untenable prospect of attempting what James Madison characterized as impossible: to be a self-governing constitutional republic without a functioning news media."

McChesney and Nichols aren't the only ones who see a coming newspaper apocalypse. Perhaps you've let your subscription to the *Daily Blat* lapse and haven't seen the headlines, but lots of people who aren't hanging out at the Left end of the political spectrum agree. Long before the recession and the Wall Street meltdown, newspapers were already weak from years of steadily shrinking circulations, falling advertising revenues, social changes, and failure to understand/appreciate/embrace the Internet and adapt.

The newspaper industry is now in what some say is a death spiral. The old business model—the one that used to rake in obscene annual net profits in big cities and small towns alike—has been destroyed by the digital hurricane. Hardly anyone under 30 touches newsprint. Classified ads have fled to Craigslist and Monster.com. Display advertising revenue has crashed because of department store consolidation, direct marketing, and now the economic downturn. Once powerful, ad-fat, rich papers like the *Los Angeles Times*, *Minneapolis Tribune*, and *Philadelphia Inquirer* are bankrupt. Some of the gloomiest industry watchers foresee a major city soon finding itself without a daily newspaper.

Print journalism is caught in a vicious circle, McChesney and Nichols say. Everyone agrees that the only hope for the long-term survival of newspapers is online. But even if editors and managers miraculously figure out how to master the Internet, papers won't be able to

make enough money from Web ads to pay for the workforce they need to produce the kind of strong journalism everyone from Thomas Jefferson to Rupert Murdoch agrees is vital to keeping the Republic free, informed, and self-governing. To save and preserve good journalism and democracy from extinction, the authors have come up with the only solution progressive journalists of their high caliber could—calling in the feds.

Their impeccable left-wing logic goes like this: America's commercial newspapers—advertising-driven, profit-seeking, increasingly corporate-owned, and inherently evil private enterprises that have always been more concerned about padding bottom lines and keeping advertisers happy than serving communities—are on the road to oblivion. If newspapers disappear, so will most quality journalism. Therefore, combining metaphorical support from Tom Paine with the hottest new Big Government idea since Medicare, the authors conclude we must begin the media world anew by bailing out the journalism sector with billions in federal subsidies.

McChesney and Nichols shamelessly play the journalism “crisis” card to justify the need for their grand plan. These are extraordinary times. We need extraordinary measures. The government must salvage journalism and immediately do what the authors repeatedly sneer the “free market” cannot or will not do. To get “a vastly superior news media that dramatically enhances the constitutional system and representative democracy,” they say, “Americans must face the hard and cold truth: journalism is a public good that is no longer commercially viable. If we want journalism, it will require public subsidies and enlightened policies.”

Before McChesney and Nichols float their specific ideas, they establish that government subsidies to journalism are part of America's founding DNA. They show that the infant U.S. government made it a point to help newspapers grow and prosper by subsidizing their out-of-

town postal rates—an idea supported by such saints of limited government as Jefferson and Madison. Jumping merrily down the slippery slope of that unfortunate precedent—and pointing at Holland and Norway as proof that enlightened governments can be trusted to subsidize good journalism without censoring or controlling it (except of course when a war or crisis comes along)—McChesney and Nichols justify the subsidies that they say are needed to keep great journalism alive.

COMBINING METAPHORICAL SUPPORT FROM TOM PAINE WITH THE **HOTTEST NEW BIG GOVERNMENT IDEA SINCE MEDICARE**, THE AUTHORS CONCLUDE WE MUST BEGIN THE MEDIA WORLD ANEW BY **BAILING OUT THE JOURNALISM SECTOR WITH BILLIONS IN FEDERAL SUBSIDIES**.

To forestall immediate financial ruin for some publications and keep as many journalists on the job as possible, the authors offer several ideas. One suggestion, long sought by publishers of non-profit opinion magazines of all ideological hues, is to lower postal rates for all periodicals with less than 25 percent of their content devoted to advertising, which in today's old-media crisis might qualify *Time* or *Newsweek*. Instead of 30 or 35 cents, the current cost of mailing a copy of *The Nation* or *The American Conservative*, the charge would be 5 cents. That idea would only cost the government first-class postal monopoly \$200 million or so—they're not quite sure—but they are just priming the federal pump.

One of McChesney and Nichols's more ambitious goals is to create a reserve army of trained young Americans for the Golden Age of Journalism they hope to unleash. To accomplish that, they want to use federal money to subsidize a student paper and radio station at every public high school in the country. They also want the federal government to make sure there is at least one newspaper alive in every community that has traditionally had

one. And they want to create a “journalism” division of AmeriCorps, the federal program that trains young people to work at nonprofits. They think it would be nice if at least 2,500 young people who yearn to become journalists were paid \$35,000 a year by the federal government for two years. It would cost \$180 million.

The authors' ideas to keep “post-corporate” newspapers alive include what appear to be some perfectly fine new or time-tested ownership models—

501(c)(3) set-ups, newspapers run by workers or community cooperatives, and the newfangled L3C Low-profit Limited Liability Company, their favorite, described as a “for-profit entity with a non-profit soul.” The *St. Petersburg Times*, run by the Poynter Institute, a journalism school, is a newspaper success story and a model of community service they want to see copied.

The details of implementing and regulating their schemes will sound to the most casual conservative or libertarian like a Monty Python sketch about the silliness of social engineering. The potential for massive fraud, waste, corruption, misspending, and ideological tomfoolery are obvious—to everyone except McChesney and Nichols, who seem unfamiliar with the idiocies and scandals that occur when outfits like ACORN or the Department of Homeland Security get their mitts on free federal money.

Anyone who doesn't already have a lifetime subscription to *The Nation* will lose his mind long before making it through the authors' carefully explained plans and policy dreams, which extend to expanding existing public-radio stations and public-television stations so

they will all have well-stocked, world-class newsrooms. But even Katrina vanden Heuvel might not make it to page 168, where—burying their lede, as we say in the journalism biz—McChesney and Nichols introduce the centerpiece of their policy recommendations, the “Citizenship News Voucher.”

If you think a “Citizenship News Voucher” is a sign that the Left is so desperate for new ideas that it’s beginning to borrow from Milton Friedman, don’t get your hopes up. McChesney and Nichols’s signature policy proposal is for a \$200 annual news voucher for every adult. It can be given to any noncommercial, public, community, nonprofit, post-corporate news medium of your choice (as long as it meets certain requirements, conditions, stipulations, and provisos). The authors figure that if it catches on, their Orwellian-sounding “Citizenship News Voucher” plan could cost around \$20 billion a year.

McChesney and Nichols estimate that the public’s total tab for creating a “satisfactory level of journalism” is \$35 billion—federal pocket change, they say. Unfortunately, in the age of \$3 trillion wars in the Middle East and trillion-dollar federal budget deficits as far as the eye can see, they are right. About \$25 billion of the \$35 billion will come from the battery of low-percentage “good journalism” taxes they say would be levied on the broadcast spectrum, consumer electronics, advertising, and monthly cellphone and Internet-service fees—none of which will ever happen in the real world.

No conservative or libertarian will be able to last four pages into this belabored op-ed piece, which has interesting pockets of information among the relentless argumentation and tedious policy-wonk stuff. McChesney and Nichols can’t help themselves, though. With few exceptions, they are textbook lefties, and they prove it on nearly every page. They love all the predictable liberal/progressive people and places—Keith Olbermann, Rachel Maddow, the BBC, PBS, NPR, the *Guardian*, Huffington Post and, of course, the poor, the

rural, the people of color, and the working class who are so inadequately served by our profit-grubbing commercial media. They hate Bill O’Reilly, profits, private enterprise, warmongering neocons, and economists who worship the (always so-called) “free market,” which they don’t understand, appreciate, or distinguish from our current economic system of crony capitalism—or is it now better described as crony socialism?

The authors say some nice things about *National Review*’s honorable conservatism and *The American Conservative*’s anti-interventionism. And most of the time they try to restrain their rhetoric and be fair to their ideological enemies. It’s near the end of the book—when they probably figured anyone still reading would be either Rachel Maddow or a tortured journalism student—that they really flash their leftist fangs.

Without naming names, they rail about the evil capitalist forces of reaction that will try to block their reform ideas. The best examples are the “dogmatic ‘free-market’ economist types

ing a new generation of disproportionately liberal reporters and editors who will most likely see nothing wrong or dangerous with government subsidizing journalism.

McChesney and Nichols open their book with a grim list of bankruptcies, newsroom layoffs, closed Washington bureaus, cuts in state capital reporters, and axed science sections. By the time they’re done, the authors have you thinking there must be about six daily newspapers and 300 working print journalists left in all of America.

In fact, despite all the headlines and hysteria, exactly 10 of the country’s 1,437 daily newspapers have stopped publishing since 2007—and that includes papers that were barely breathing, like the *Albuquerque Tribune*, circulation 10,000, and the *South Idaho Press*, weekday-only circulation 3,850. As for all those lost journalism jobs, nobody seems to know the exact number, but it’s probably about 15,000 in the last 23 months. The American Society of Newspaper Editors says newsroom employment in the

DESPITE ALL THE HYSTERIA, EXACTLY 10 OF THE COUNTRY’S 1,437 DAILY NEWSPAPERS HAVE STOPPED PUBLISHING SINCE 2007—AND THAT INCLUDES PAPERS THAT WERE BARELY BREATHING, LIKE THE ALBUQUERQUE TRIBUNE, CIRCULATION 10,000.

who have for decades been telling us that government can’t do anything right, except, perhaps, organize wars, lock people up and manage prisons” and the peddlers of “deregulation” and those “fabulists” who talk about “the infallible genius of free enterprise and the despicable nature of government.”

Though they would never think of putting it this way, what McChesney and Nichols would create with their generous rain of federal subsidies is a future journalism bubble inflated with taxpayer money. Their ultimate mad dream is 160,000 full-time working journalists by 2020—about double the number now. That would cost \$7.2 billion, roughly. Still federal pocket change but an absurd price to pay for artificially grow-

U.S. dropped to about 47,000 in 2008. Journalism jobs are especially precious because they protect our freedoms, as McChesney and Nichols never tire of reminding us. But to put the newspaper industry’s losses in perspective, in September alone the construction industry shed 64,000 jobs.

Bankruptcy, job cuts, closed newspapers like the *Rocky Mountain News*—these are dismal events today, but in the long run they should turn out to be beneficial. The industry is going through a long delayed and necessary period of deindustrialization and contraction that will force it to dramatically change its business and journalism models. Newspapers as we know them—living relics of the 19th century—will evolve into

new and unpredictable multimedia beings of different sizes, shapes, and ownership models that blend print, TV, radio, and the Internet—or die.

McChesney and Nichols don't buy any of this trust-the-free-market, embrace-the-creative-destruction-of-capitalism stuff for one second, but Jeff Jarvis does. A former newsman who's become a guru of digital journalism, Jarvis has been a sharp and brutal critic of newspapers for failing to adapt to the Internet 15 years ago. Unlike McChesney and Nichols, who quote the creator of BuzzMachine.com in passing, Jarvis is not afraid of the radical changes that are coming in the news media. Although he is a liberal, he has no urge to control or shape them with government subsidies or bailouts.

Jarvis thinks the production of journalism in the mostly digital future might end up looking like the decentralized Hollywood movie-making companies that replaced the old studio system: multi-skilled journalists will become freelancing entrepreneurs who are hired for short periods to work on stories and projects the way producers temporarily hire cameramen and set directors to make a movie. As for good journalism, he sees no crisis on the horizon. In fact, he told me, he thinks journalism is going to get better. "It's going to reinvent itself" and "even improve itself and grow and become more targeted and deeper in the community. It's going to be very different." Neither Jarvis nor anyone else can predict the ways in which the digital revolution is going to "begin the world again" for journalism and the news media, but it's inevitable that big changes will come. Based on a reading of *The Death and Life of American Journalism*, it's also inevitable—and encouraging—that McChesney and Nichols will hate most of them. ■

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[A Bomb in Every Issue: How the Short, Unruly Life of Ramparts Magazine Changed America, Peter Richardson, The New Press, 247 pages]

A Fistful of Dynamite

By Daniel McCarthy

"IT'S AS IF Norman Mailer, Thomas Pynchon, and Doris Lessing had decided to collaborate on a true-life story," says Todd Gitlin. That's overrating *A Bomb in Every Issue*, but not by much. Peter Richardson's book vies with Gitlin's own *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* as one of the most vivid accounts of the antiwar and eventually anti-American New Left. Richardson tells the story in miniature—in little more than 200 pages—through the rise and fall of the radical magazine *Ramparts*, which blazoned on one cover in 1969, "Alienation is when your county is at war and you want the other side to win."

After Che Guevara was killed in Bolivia, Fidel Castro chose *Ramparts* as the American outlet for excerpts from Che's diary. Years earlier, the magazine had scored a coup against the CIA, and the mainstream press, by uncovering the agency's hand in the National Student Association. Before he became minister of information for the Black Panther Party, Eldridge Cleaver was an editor for *Ramparts*, where many of the pieces that became *Soul on Ice* first appeared. Though the magazine survived just 13 years, it's had a long legacy, with *Rolling Stone* and *Mother Jones* as direct descendants—both were begun by disgruntled *Ramparts* editors and based in part on its cutting-edge graphic design—and spiritual heirs as divergent as the *Daily Kos* and the neoconservative *FrontPageMag*, whose founder, David Horowitz, was as a young leftist one of the last editors of *Ramparts*.

No one could have foreseen that an austere literary publication launched in

1962 as "a forum for the mature American Catholic" would turn into the muck-raking equivalent of a Molotov cocktail. Certainly California businessman Edward Keating, the passionate convert who created *Ramparts*, imagined no such thing. "Keating's keen sense of justice attuned him to racial inequality and civil rights issues," Richardson writes, "but his other views could be conservative, even reactionary." At a party Keating announced that if he were president, "he would jail J.D. Salinger 'because he's dirty.'" Early issues of *Ramparts*—which "according to one designer ... looked like the poetry annual of a mid-western girls school"—flailed Salinger and Tennessee Williams for their apparent nihilism. Williams's characters, Keating thought, were "psychotic or merely wretched" and attested to a despairing view of mankind. As Richardson notes, the magazine's take on the rather more right-wing Wyndham Lewis, on the other hand, was "more complimentary."

But Keating was no rightist. He fired an associate editor thought to have ties to the John Birch Society after rumors of that connection frightened away liberal Jesuits. If the first incarnation of *Ramparts* had a philosophical lodestar, it was the serene but intensely reformist Trappist monk (and bestselling author of *The Seven Storey Mountain*) Thomas Merton, whose involvement "strengthened [the magazine's] standing in the liberal Catholic and peace communities." Merton counseled strong support for civil rights, but warned of "a serious possibility of an eventual civil war that might wreck the fabric of American society" and feared "there might be a danger of Marxist elements 'capturing' the revolution."

One of Keating's first recruits was a twenty-something journalist named Warren Hinckle, a lapsing Catholic, recent graduate of the Jesuit University of San Francisco, and monophthalmic since a childhood car accident. Hinckle had an outsized personality and a knack for publicity to match. Even before he became the magazine's executive editor in its second year, he started taking

Ramparts in a more confrontational direction. The October 1964 issue carried a cover story tagged as “An extraordinary account of the Harlem Riots—told by the people who were there—in words few white men have ever heard” and featured on its back cover “a large photo of a black man with a nasty head wound holding a bloody handkerchief; a helmeted white policeman loomed over him.” The next issue assailed Barry Goldwater and Cardinal James McIntyre, with an increasingly radical Keating declaring, “If both had their way, Church and State would be carried back to those tranquil days where six-guns and the Inquisition settled matters both quickly and unequivocally.”

The '60s were breaking loose. But as Richardson documents in his brilliant description of the milieu that gave birth to *Ramparts*, the radicalism of the era didn't begin with Kennedy's assassination and President Johnson's escalation of the war in Vietnam. Revolt against the complacent, corporatist liberalism of the early Cold War was already simmering when JFK visited the University of California, a Berkeley in 1962 to stump for Gov. Edmund Brown's re-election. The university had become a “multiversity,” in the argot of UC president Clark Kerr; in the eyes of young critics, it had become an appendage of the military-industrial complex. The year of Kennedy's visit, two Marxist graduate students, David Horowitz and Robert Scheer—both future editors of *Ramparts*—helped launch *Root and Branch: A Radical Quarterly*. A black activist they brought to campus declared, “I'm for Castro because Castro is for the black man.” The Left burned with moral fire, while establishment liberals like Kennedy—well, the president burned with something else. “After his remarks,” Richardson writes, “President Kennedy headed south for Palm Springs, where he stayed with Bing Crosby. The next day, he called on Dwight Eisenhower, his White House predecessor, and had sex with Marilyn Monroe, another Crosby houseguest. The following day, he attended mass.”

Hippies didn't invent free love or hard drugs. The latter came courtesy of the U.S. Army, which promoted research into LSD. “I do not contend that driving people crazy—even for a few hours—is a pleasant prospect,” one officer wrote in defense of the practice, “But warfare is never pleasant. ... Would you rather be temporarily deranged, blinded, or paralyzed by a chemical agent, or burned alive by a conventional fire bomb?” Ken Kesey, then a student at Stanford University, had an answer to that question. He took his first tabs as a volunteer in a clinical trial at a VA hospital. The CIA might not have trucked crack to the inner cities, but it was the Army that turned the original Merry Prankster on to acid. He introduced LSD to Jerry Garcia, who introduced it to millions.

Richardson doesn't waste words moralizing. He draws a picture and leaves the reader to draw conclusions—one of which might be that you could hardly blame a young man for wanting to take a blowtorch to the entire puking establishment. That was how many of the youthful writers at *Ramparts* felt. Its circulation was growing—Hinckle almost doubled it, to 4,000 subscribers, in his first year—and thanks to the addition of a brilliant graphic designer named

Dugald Stermer, it was on its way to revolutionizing the look of magazines. Soon circulation was more than doubling—rocketing to 149,000 by January 1967, then 229,000 two months later. But it was a financial disaster. Like almost all political magazines, *Ramparts* never turned a profit, and expenses proved proportional to growth.

Hinckle spent extravagantly—he told a journalist from the *New York Times* that, contrary to reports, he had not flown from Chicago to Paris to New York to circumvent an airline strike. He had flown from San Francisco to Paris to New York—if he had been in Chicago, he said, he would have taken a taxi. Keating quickly exhausted his own fortune and his wife's, but Hinckle's fundraising almost kept pace with his burn rate. “I like the way you spend my money,” one millionaire donor reportedly told him. Hinckle covered the budget's shortfalls by making cuts—not to his expense account but to funds earmarked for paying the printers. *Ramparts'* publishing schedule, notionally monthly, could be erratic.

Ramparts rose in part because it didn't flinch from damning the bloody business in Vietnam. Robert Scheer made his mark with a 1965 cover story

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debunking Thomas Dooley's *Deliver Us From Evil*, an almost decade-old book that Scheer argued had "served to greatly confuse the American public on the true situation in Vietnam. It gave the delusion that we were simply helping a whole people along the path to *their* freedom when for better or worse they wanted to travel the other way." "We had come too late to Vietnam," Dooley had written, "but we had come. And we brought not bombs and guns, but help and love." *Ramparts* put the lie to that, as much by the photographs it ran illustrating the "collateral damage" of the war—civilian men, women, and children dead, mutilated, and burned—as by essays like Scheer's. The magazine's coverage was instrumental in driving Martin Luther King Jr. to speak out against the war in the year before his assassination.

Scheer went to Vietnam as an independent journalist; soon he was *Ramparts*' foreign editor. He became as important to the magazine as Hinckle—"Hink/Scheer" was Jessica Mitford's term for the evolving editorial duumvirate. In 1966, Scheer mounted a

affair with another pro-Castro journalist, Michèle Ray, in Havana—and Scheer had broken with Democratic Party precedent by inviting Communists to support his primary challenge. But neither he nor the magazine accepted the anti-American label in 1966. "Scheer's main point," Richardson writes,

was that other countries, including Cuba and Vietnam, should be allowed to make their own histories without interference from the United States. In the context of the cold war, that position was widely regarded as procommunist, but it outlasted that conflict and eventually extended to nations like Iran, where, Scheer later wrote, U.S. mischief beginning in the 1950s had produced 'a sorry history.'

"Hinckle and Stermer were rebels, not leftists, and they tempered Scheer's radical tendencies," says Richardson. *Ramparts* walked a narrow line between an all-American anarchism—akin to what the arch-individualist Benjamin Tucker had called "unterrified Jeffersonianism"—and Third World

itly anti-American and pro-Communist. *Ramparts* was sucked into the vortex—though to be sure, it had contributed to the currents that created maelstrom in the first place.

Keating had been thrown overboard years before. Hinckle jumped ship in 1969, leaving first Scheer, then Horowitz in charge. "Forged in the violence and despair of 1968, the magazine's new line rejected anything short of revolution and explicitly conceded the symbols of patriotism to the right wing," Richardson writes, and a little more than halfway through, his book becomes exceedingly depressing, a chronicle of murder, misogyny, Maoist self-criticism sessions, collectivization of the *Ramparts* staff—except for Dugald Stermer, who was offered a cozy "separate and unequal" deal by Horowitz if he would stay on staff; Stermer told him to get stuffed—and eventually, inevitably, the rise of neoconservatism. The New Left, Richardson observes, "had exposed the weakness of American liberalism but hadn't replaced it with anything stronger. Moreover, its attacks had alienated mainstream America and made a successful new coalition unlikely." A successful new coalition on the Left, that is—instead, Richard Nixon built a successful coalition on the new Right.

We've all had to live with the consequences for 40 years. Weatherman self-destructed, blown up by its own bombs. Horowitz found a new, post-Marxist faith in a nationalist right-wing creed that looks a lot like the old Cold War liberalism. Huey Newton, the thug hailed by his admirers as the black Lenin, was shot and killed in 1989 by 24-year-old hoodlum in West Oakland. But the myth of a revolutionary, Marxist, America-hating Left survives and continues to push ordinary Americans into supporting new Vietnams and the nation-building, social-engineering projects of former revolutionary, Marxist, America-hating leftists. Somebody should have listened to Thomas Merton. ■

Daniel McCarthy is senior editor of The American Conservative.

RAMPARTS WALKED A NARROW LINE BETWEEN AN **ALL-AMERICAN ANARCHISM**—AKIN TO WHAT THE ARCH-INDIVIDUALIST BENJAMIN TUCKER HAD CALLED "**UNTERRIFIED JEFFERSONIANISM**"—AND **THIRD WORLD REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISM**.

quixotic—but almost successful—challenge to an incumbent Democratic congressman. His objective was to pressure Rep. Jeffrey Cohelan into opposing the war. Scheer also appeared on William F. Buckley Jr.'s "Firing Line" to debate the question, "Is *Ramparts* Magazine Un-American?" He didn't give an inch to Buckley—either on the substance of the question or in the style of the debate, which devolved, says Richardson, "into an intellectual food fight at a time when such spectacles were rare on broadcast television." *Ramparts* more than flirted with Fidel Castro—indeed, Scheer would shatter his marriage by having an

revolutionary communism. The year of Martin Luther King's murder (and Robert Kennedy's) and the police riot at the Democratic National Convention, 1968, would be the tipping point. Already the antiwar movement and the civil-rights struggle were becoming more violent and revolutionary. King's assassination kick-started a new, more intense round of confrontations between police and the Black Panthers (to which *Ramparts* was connected through Eldridge Cleaver), while the radical Students for a Democratic Society morphed into incompetently terrorist Weatherman. The Tom Hayden Left was explic-

[*Stylized: A Slightly Obsessive History of Strunk & White's The Elements of Style*, Mark Garvey, Touchstone, 240 pages]

What Are Words Worth?

By Peter W. Wood

"OMIT NEEDLESS WORDS"—the gnomic Rule Thirteen in William Strunk's original 1918 self-published edition of *The Elements of Style*—is the kind of advice that means less and less the more you think about it. Which words are needless? What need are we talking about? Just conveying information or mood, too? Sublunary matters or glimpses of God?

Strunk's exposition of Rule Thirteen seems sensible, at least initially:

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

But these sentences soften under steady gaze. Vigorous writing is not always concise. Gibbon is not concise. Dickens can be, but isn't always. Unnecessary sentences abound in good writing, or some kinds of good writing—the kind that is companionable, humane, allusive, and willing to treat the reader as a friend, not a customer.

Catch Strunk's metaphors: no unnecessary sentences "for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts." This is a man writing at the dawn of the machine age. Aesthetic modernism is in the air, and it looks a lot like the noonday sun, blinding its devo-

tees to the joys of checkered shade, nature's profusion of unnecessary lines, and the delights of machines scrolled with ornament and exuberantly ticking parts that are added because they are possible, not because they are necessary.

Strunk's is the voice of stern minimalism, a reaction against overstuffed Victorian furniture and a culture blurred into rhetorical complacency. Strunk (1869-1946) was a near contemporary of the famously laconic Calvin Coolidge (1872-1933)—one of the few observations about Strunk's Great Rule that Mark Garvey does not make in *Stylized: A Slightly Obsessive History of Strunk & White's The Elements of Style*.

Garvey, however, is at his best in those passages where he attempts to take the heft of Strunk's preference for the spare. *The Elements of Style*, he says, "embodies a worldview." He explains:

It is a book of promises—a promise that creative freedom is enabled, not hindered, by putting your faith in a few helpful rules; the promise that careful, clear thinking and writing can occasionally touch truth; the promise of depth in simplicity and beauty in plainness; and the promise that by turning away from artifice and ornamentation you will find your true voice.

Garvey is surely right to locate the enduring appeal of *The Elements of Style* in these largely unspoken promises. He is also right to pick out "Omit needless words" as the pivot of the Strunkian universe. That three-word command, he says, "continues to ring like a Lao Tzu aphorism at the book's center." I have known academic colleagues in whom this Zen-like rule, in its exacting, Bauhaus-on-the-page austerity, has taken full possession. They comb and re-comb every paragraph seeking perfect nudity. They do not rest until every vestment is torn away and every noun and verb stands blushing naked. And what remains is indeed clear and readable, like tracks in the desert sands.

Garvey never quite comes to terms with the desertification of English prose wrought by Strunk & White cultists. Perhaps it is because he is himself a devotee—though not the hard-core sort whose adoration of the purging of needless words leads their prose ever closer to that epitome of concision, the white pages of the telephone book. Instead, Garvey pleads the case that, rightly understood, Strunk's edict is capacious. It allows for good writing of many types and in many voices. Rule Thirteen is about clearing away clutter, uprooting obstacles, and bringing blessed order to the roiling chaos of our unfinished thoughts.

When Garvey urges this winsome Strunk—Strunk-the-judicious—my heart melts. But then I wonder: why have so many earnest people studied *The Elements of Style* and come away convinced that good writing involves squeezing every last drop from the grapefruit and then eating the rind? Do Strunk and his famous student E.B. White bear no responsibility for this heresy? After all, they preached a creed of clarity. Shouldn't their book be clear about its purpose? But if Garvey is right, a lot of readers have gone astray in *The Elements of Style*. They have imagined it a fundamentalist sect, when it is truly just an older brother's counsel.

I am unsettled on this point. As a sometime teacher of English rhetoric, I have had students who benefit from Strunk's edicts. But what today's students seem to need most is hard practice under the close supervision of someone who helps them see their mistakes.

Students also need to come to terms with metaphor. Almost everything we write, if it is any good, points beyond itself to larger realities. Even if an essay doesn't deploy noticeable metaphors, it can lift the reader and carry him somewhere only if, deep down, it is metaphor. So when Garvey reads *The Elements of Style* as a metaphor for the goodness of clear thinking, simplicity, and truth, I sigh in admiration. Yes, Garvey has read *The Elements* aright. But *The Elements of Style* itself is unwilling to avow this truth. Nothing in the original

book agitates against the role of metaphor in good writing; it just treats it as a not very pressing topic.

This makes it all the more surprising that E.B. White's greatest gift as a writer was the graceful metaphor. Nearly everything he wrote, from his hundreds of "Notes and Comment" pieces for *The New Yorker* to his melancholically beautiful children's book *Charlotte's Web*, breathes metaphor. Yet when he became Strunk's posthumous collaborator in the 1959 edition of *The Elements of Style*, he keeps his counsel. White's major addition to the book was a chapter titled "An Approach to Style," swapped in as a new chapter five to replace a chapter six in the original, "Words Often Misspelled."

White's advice has the quality of Polonius giving young Laertes the bromide, "To thine own self be true." Well, ok. That's a lot better than, "Doll it up. Turn on. See how many outrageous selves you can conjure from the fragments of your disintegrating personality." And compared to some of what is now on offer in English composition courses, the anodyne advice that White gives is

bracing stuff. "Place yourself in the background," he declares. Can the children and grandchildren of narcissists manage that trick after 12 years of self-esteem training and the urging of teachers to dwell endlessly on their marvelous selves? White prompts some to try, and that would be reason alone to treasure the little book.

"Write with nouns and verbs." Usually. "Avoid fancy words." I wonder about that. White himself avoided them, but reader and writer alike can take pleasure in finding the unknown apt word. We sometimes itch for it. I've longed for years to find a word that means "the moon as seen in daylight." I haven't found it, but I've found the word that means the part of the body you cannot reach to scratch. White's approach to style is lucid and encouraging, but has its own acnestis.

Would Garvey's book about Strunk and White pass muster with Strunk and White? It seems an obvious question and one that appears to have been on Garvey's mind. Scattered through the volume are passages that sound like Garvey's slightly overwrought attempts to perform Strunk and Whitean prose:

A small box in the Cornell archives holds a few of Strunk's surviving papers and notebooks. They provide clear evidence of an ordered, scholarly mind singularly focused on the academic passions that drove him. His doctoral thesis is here: 155 typed, double-spaced pages titled *The Anglo-Saxon Remains of Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, a readable study limning the influence of the likes of Pseudo-Matthew and the Apocalypse of Paul on the like of Bede and Cynewulf. The notebooks contain his thoughts in a hasty but legible hand—small, imperfect, angular, flecked with bits of Greek, Latin, Old English—for lectures or for writing projects, notes on Kipling, Dante, Greek drama, Buddhism, Shakespeare.

Garvey, author of *Come Together: The Official John Lennon Educational Tour*

Bus Guide to Music and Video, doesn't seem the sort of guy who would say "flecked with bits of Greek" unless he were trying to be something other than himself. He faults Strunk at only one point—for "equating *good* with *manly*" in the sentence, "The first virtue, the touchstone of masculine style, is its use of the active verb and the concrete noun." Not very manly of you Mark, to smack down a long-dead writer for failing to abide by today's gender shibboleths.

Garvey also stumbles by cluttering his book with testimonials from various writers of the moment—Alec Wilkerson, Dave Barry, Elmore Leonard, Ian Frazier, Adam Gopnik, the noxious Nicholson Baker, Damon Lindelof, Frank McCourt, Will Blythe, and Sharon Olds. They have nothing to say in this context that rewards the time it takes to read them. Their contributions read very much like a collection of edited e-mails in which Garvey plays to their vanity.

These faults are redeemed perhaps by one extended passage in which Garvey defends the ethical soundness of Strunk and White's project against the English faculty of today: "Many English departments have really taken great literature away from the students; it's just horrifying." Garvey finds some genuine fervor here, "You can't have society without rationality. And rationality demands clarity." Strunk and White are the great voices for clarity in composition against "the whirlwind of 'theory.'"

Thrumming away inside this book about style is a most unstylish idea, but an idea that is also one of the most durable, encouraging, and commonsensical notions ever to inspire a student or fire the mind of a writer: the belief that careful, clear thinking and writing can uncover the truth.

I am not sure "thrumming" is the right word, but this is surely the right idea. ■

Peter W. Wood is executive director of the National Association of Scholars and author of *A Bee in the Mouth: Anger in America Now*.

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[For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus, Frederick Brown, Alfred A. Knopf, 336 pages]

Vive la Différence

By Piers Paul Read

ONE OF THE THINGS that strikes the tourist about the smallest of villages in rural France is the grandiosity of the school and the town hall. This is not functional: it is to rival the village church and mark the triumph of the secular state over Roman Catholicism in the last decades of the 19th century. As the tourist travels along the country lanes, he will see evidence of the Church's counterattack—stone crosses at intersections commemorating the missions preached to the peasants to save their souls from the atheist anticlerical governments in Paris.

This was the battle *For the Soul of France*, the title of a new book by Frederick Brown, a praised biographer of two novelists of the period, Flaubert and Zola. Brown's opening chapters describe the building of monuments to the rival ideologies, not in *la France profonde* but in Paris. The first is the huge neo-Byzantine basilica dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on Montmartre, built at the behest of devout Catholics as an act of expiation for the sins that had led to France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and the sacrilegious excesses of the Parisian Communards during their uprising in 1871. The second, the monument to secularism, is the Eiffel Tower, built for the Universal Exposition held in 1889 to celebrate the centenary of the French Revolution.

While clericalists and monarchists were ascendant in the early days of the Third Republic—hence the building of Sacre Coeur—the rival claims of the Bonapartists, Orleanists, and Legitimists ensured that the republic survived. The nearest it came to being overthrown was in 1886 when the popular and charismatic General Boulanger came close to mounting a *coup d'état*. He hesitated,

however, and was lost—committing suicide on the grave of his mistress at the Ixelles Cemetery in Brussels.

Brown describes the rise and fall of Boulanger in a chapter, "France on a Horse." He further has a chapter on the crash of the Union Générale, a stupendously successful fund founded by right-wing royalists in 1875 to enable Catholics to invest their money in a financial institution not controlled by Jews. In France, industrialization had gathered pace during the reign of Napoleon III, and French industries were in a position to compete with Germany and Britain. Huge profits were to be made in coal, steel, and railways. Playing the stock market, Brown tells us, became "a collective delirium." Unfortunately for the Catholic investors in the Union Générale, its dynamic CEO, Eugène Bontoux, turned out to be something of a Bernie Madoff of his time. The shares crashed. The company went bankrupt. The investors blamed the Rothschilds in Vienna for buying and dumping Union stock.

Blaming the Rothschilds confirmed the line taken by anti-Semites such as Edouard Drumont in his best-selling book, *La France Juive*: international Jewry would always combine to destroy any gentile rivals in the world of finance. The liberation of the Jews at the time of the French Revolution had led to a rapid rise in power and influence of what Drumont and many French Catholics regarded as an alien tribe. Jewish pre-eminence in the world of finance coincided with the rise of a money economy, and many in France, hitherto used to an identifiable feudal hierarchy, felt that power was now exercised through bribery and corruption by cabals behind closed doors.

These suspicions, aroused by the collapse of the Union Générale, seemed to be confirmed by the Panama Scandal of 1888. Ferdinand de Lesseps, after successfully building a canal at Suez to link the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, set up a company to do the same for the Atlantic and Pacific oceans in Panama. Vast sums of capital were raised and invested but the project foundered thanks to treacherous terrain and tropical dis-

eases. To stave off bankruptcy, de Lesseps persuaded the French government to authorize a lottery. When the company went bankrupt in 1890, an inquiry uncovered corruption on a huge scale: politicians, newspapers, and ministers had been bought by stupendous bribes paid through de Lesseps's personal financial adviser, the Jewish Baron Jacques de Reinach, and a fellow fixer with a similar German-Jewish background, Cornelius Herz.

The revelations about corruption in the Panama Scandal were disseminated by Drumont's anti-Semitic newspaper, *La Libre Parole*. The first loyalties of French Jews, wrote Drumont, were to their race, not the nation. He harked back to the Damascus Affair of 1840, which Brown does not mention, when lobbying by influential Jews in Western European capitals effected the release of a number of their co-religionists in Damascus, who had been convicted of the ritual murder of a Capucin friar. As Albert S. Lindemann wrote in *The Jew Accused*, "Anti-Semites, and even some Europeans who were not particularly hostile to Jews, saw in the Damascus Affair evidence of a central contradiction in the ideal of Jewish emancipation."

La Libre Parole campaigned in particular against the commissioning of Jewish officers in the French Army. It was not that Jewish officers might betray their country: "Not at all. They cannot betray a country to which they do not belong, they are in it for business, for diplomacy, for politics—that's the beginning and end of it." In October 1894, those fears appeared to be validated with the arrest, on a charge of spying for the Germans, of a Jewish captain in the artillery, Alfred Dreyfus.

Captain Dreyfus's career up to that point showed just what could be achieved by Jews in France thanks to their equality before the law: his father, initially a salesman and textile broker, founded a successful business in Mulhouse. His fortune enabled his youngest son, Alfred, to go to the best schools and universities in Paris. A high-flyer in the army, Alfred merited, on paper, a place on the General Staff: he was marked down only for his ability to

get on with his fellow officers, for which he received zero.

Dreyfus was gauche and spent his money on *femmes galantes* rather than bonding with his fellow officers. The top brass in the French army did not want Dreyfus on the General Staff because he was a Jew and a meritocrat: he was too clever by half. When they received evidence that there was a traitor in the officer corps, investigators were undoubtedly more open to the idea that he might be a duplicitous Jew rather than—as turned out to be the case—the descendant of French army generals of the Napoleonic era.

But Dreyfus would not have been charged had his handwriting not been so similar to that on the incriminating *bordereau*. Nor, once he was convicted, was there any reason for the public to doubt that justice had been done. So when his heroic wife Lucie and debonair brother Mathieu started lobbying for a revision of his case and spending lavishly—it is estimated that the family spent around a million francs on their campaign—the French Right saw a rerun of the Damascus Affair: influential Jews, “the syndicate,” coming to the aid of a traitor because he was of one of their own.

In the event, the anti-Dreyfusards turned out to be wrong. Dreyfus was wholly innocent. But it is historically anachronistic to see visceral anti-Semitism as the sole explanation for this misapprehension. Even now it seems incredible that the army High Command would go to such lengths to cover up a judicial error—not simply lying and forging evidence, but taking the actual traitor, once he was discovered, under their wing. If one looks ahead to Vichy France, one sees that the seeds of France’s own anti-Semitic laws and the round-up and deportation of French Jews by the French state were sown at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. In other ways, however, the affair reflects well on France: Dreyfus was treated brutally on Devil’s Island, but he was not waterboarded or held without due process of law.

Brown gives a good summary of both the Panama Scandal and the complex

Dreyfus Affair, though there are no new insights, and he does not have the space to bring out some of the comic, paradoxical, and sometimes salacious aspects of the story: this was, after all, the *belle époque*. He stimulates his readers to make comparisons with culture wars in our own time between science and religion. If there is a lacuna in this otherwise excellent survey, it is the lack of a chapter on the influence of Freemasonry and the extent to which the minorities who supposedly felt no affection for the France of St. Louis or St. Joan of Arc—the Protestants and the Jews—were represented in the Lodges. Mathieu Dreyfus flirted with Freemasonry.

Le cléricalisme, voilà l’ennemi! said Léon Gambetta, and the enemy was defeated. In 1906, the Combes government, with a number of Freemason ministers, laicized French education and expelled the French religious orders. To some extent, French Catholics had brought this upon themselves, not just by backing the wrong horse in the Dreyfus Affair but by being unable to disentangle their religious faith from their political convictions. Long after Pope Leo XIII had urged French Catholics to come to terms with their country’s republican government, the French Right plotted for the restoration of a king. Indeed, the hijacking of Catholicism by French royalists and nationalists led to the absurdity of Charles Maurras, the author and poet, a Catholic who did not believe in God.

There was a truce in the French culture wars during World War I in the face of the common enemy, but they resumed with ferocity in the 1930s. Today all passion seems spent. The signs are that future culture wars in France will not be between secularists and the Catholic Church but between secularists and Islam. ■

Piers Paul Read is an author whose books include Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors and a history of the crusading order, The Templars. He is currently working on a book about the Dreyfus Affair.

Going South

Continued from page 9

Decline and Fall?

The Third Worlding of America is less cinematic but more serious than empire-in-decline analogies suggest. After all, Britain no longer wields global supremacy, but it is still firmly in the First World, its political class scrutinized by an independent, assertive media. And even after its post-World War II penury, it did not backpedal on political reforms at home. This is not to excuse the colonizer’s brutality abroad but rather to distinguish Britain’s imperial decline from America’s homeland decay.

The United States has transgressed her traditions in the fog of war before, only to redeem herself later. But we are now engaged in a war without borders against a self-multiplying enemy. There is no army to trounce, so no clear end to the bloodletting or bankrupting.

The patchouli-scented youth, who protest in the streets of D.C. with their towering papier-mâché effigies, may have been correct after all in highlighting the breadth of America’s all-encompassing problems—if not their remedies. Crisis has pushed the U.S. toward Third World policies with alarming swiftness. But the risk is not that Americans will bring out the pitchforks and join the protestors. Rather, citizens seem as disaffected and resigned as their Third World brethren, only occasionally roused from reality TV by their favorite pundit peddling the outrage du jour.

The far Right wallows in paranoia with its dreams of overturning an election by discovering a Kenyan birth certificate. Most on the Left seem too mesmerized by the president to hold him accountable. The media ranges from insipid to hysterical. This country may never see the reasons for—and the parallels to—its disintegration. ■

Ximena Ortiz is a former executive editor of The National Interest and bureau chief for Associated Press-Dow Jones in Santiago, Chile.

Boulder Rocks

I always figured that if ever I got to Boulder, Colorado, it would be as a student at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, whose eponym was the Taft

Republican novelist from Lowell, Massachusetts, at whose gravesite my wife left her bridal bouquet.

Instead, I rolled into Boulder to debate—a most un-Kerouacian act, although for all his shyness, Saint Jack had a knack for the non sequitur to which there is no reply. He once halted the verbigeration of a strange episode of “Firing Line” by barking a line from a tune by Slim & Slam: “Flat foot floogie with a floy floy.”

How do you answer that?

My worthy opponent in Boulder was Gary Gregg of the University of Louisville, able debater and genial post-debate drinking companion. We had a grand old time of it and the college kids didn’t seem overly bored ... hell, we probably ought to take this show on the road as a slightly more highbrow version of the WWE.

Our subject? Whether or not the Constitution ought to have been ratified. Now that’s a debate that has grown cold in 220 years, eh?

Poised as ever on the cutting edge of antiquarian irrelevancy, I took the Anti-Federalist side, arguing for liberty and self-rule within a small and modest republic and against the designing men who scrapped the Articles of Confederation for what Patrick Henry called “the most fatal plan that could possibly be conceived to enslave a free people.”

Yet I was no epicene Oxonian willing to argue it either way. *I mean it man*, as a Ron Paul admirer once spat onto vinyl. The Constitution was our first mistake.

I channeled the bibulous Maryland Anti-Federalist Luther Martin, whose

dubious fortune it was to attract me as a biographer (*Forgotten Founder; Drunken Prophet: The Life of Luther Martin*). Sarcotically, we are equally disheveled, but my man Luther, whose bile rode on a rummy wave, could’ve drunk under the table every fratboy in Boulder. I was sipping water, so my impersonation lacked the necessary alcoholic verisimilitude.

In America, the losers in history’s debates either grow devil’s horns or disappear into the gray cloud of consensus, while the winners acquire absurd haloes. Never was this more the case than in the struggle over the Constitution.

The primary architects and defenders of the document were grandiose universalists who believed, as Gouverneur Morris told the Constitutional Convention, that they “came here as ... representative[s] of the whole human race.” The placeless land speculator James Wilson explained that the consolidators had “to form our calculations on a scale commensurate to a large portion of the globe.” These men saw a forest but no trees.

This disorder extends to the *Federalist Papers*, wherein local attachments and local knowledge are belittled throughout. That whinging hypochondriac James Madison argues in *Federalist* 10 for a “large over a small republic” because the former will have “representatives whose enlightened views and sentiments render them superior to local prejudices and to schemes of injustice.” The staggering inaccuracy of this observation has not in the least detracted from the éclat accorded this essay by students of American government.

Yet the Anti-Federalists, prophetic on matters ranging from the imperial presidency to emasculation of the states, misread the future. “[C]an it be supposed,” asked Luther Martin, that people who had so recently fought a revolution for independence “would ever submit to have a national government established, the seat of which would be more than a thousand miles removed from some of them?”

Well, they did. And after the steady nationalization not only of political power but of culture and financial decision-making, today we the people submit to any depredation from distant authorities. Our rulers in Washington send kids from Boulder across James Wilson’s globe to die for nothing, their blood seeding faraway sands—and Colorado meekly submits. The Anti-Federalists thought we’d fight back. Maybe they thought too much of us.

I am sorry to say, Dr. Franklin, that we did not keep the Republic. We blew it. Luther Martin warned us that this was going to happen. The conservative shibboleth when objecting to egregious acts in Washington has long been “It’s unconstitutional!” The Anti-Federalists would have told you that such “unconstitutional” interventions were inevitable.

If we cannot undo 1787 at least we can cut the Constitutionolatry and acknowledge as ancestors the Anti-Federalists, those forgotten localist patriots who stood for small things, for liberty, for their homes, against the assault of centralization.

“Happiness is preferable to the Splendors of a national Government,” said Luther Martin, in vain, to a Constitutional Convention whose delegates, forgetting modesty, aimed at glory and grandeur.

He might as well have told Madison, “Flat foot floogie with a floy floy.” ■

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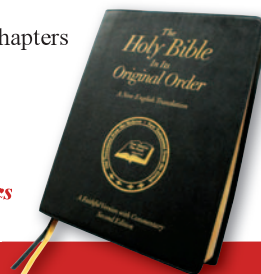
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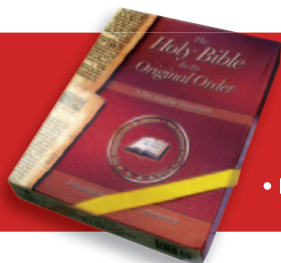
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| \$119.50 | \$99.50 \$99.50 |
| Deluxe Lambskin | Black Faux Calfskin Paper Edition w/ carrying case |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Check/Money Order enclosed | <input type="checkbox"/> Please bill my credit card: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MC <input type="checkbox"/> VISA <input type="checkbox"/> AMEX <input type="checkbox"/> DISC | |
| CC# _____ | Exp. ____ / ____ |
| Signature _____ | Sec Code _____ |
| CA residents please add 9.75% sales tax | |

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